

# **Transforming the Jordan Rift Valley: Turning Wadi Araba into a governable space**

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Ar-Risha/ Wadi Araba (A. Vermaelen 2011)





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## English summary

The dissertation starts from a broad research theme that addresses the use of the idea of culture in the formation of the state of Jordan and the interrelated process of the politics of development. Keeping the context of Jordan close to the analysis, the dissertation also aims to draw attention to Wadi Araba, a so-called out-of-the-way place. Wadi Araba is a southern area running along the Israel/Palestine border, south from the Dead Sea. (Settled) Bedouin groups inhabit the area. The progress of the dissertation has been steered by three (general) points. These points have been decisive to elucidate the process to form Wadi Araba as a governable space(s) within the broader formation of Jordan.

First, the naturalisation of the notion of culture has created a dichotomy between a normalised perception of life and the life of people in Wadi Araba as a-normal or a-civic. Second, development is an act of governmentality. Third, places in the margins of the state, as Wadi Araba, are of crucial importance for an understanding of the process of state formation and the politics of development. Starting from these three points, the concepts culture, development and governmentality serve as keywords throughout the dissertation.

With the broader theme and the three aforementioned points, the doctorate has two objectives. On the one hand the dissertation illustrates that development initiatives designated for Wadi Araba imply what I have called 'a design for life'. The way local Bedouins organise their living is not perceived as modern and causes a barrier for Jordan to be fully recognised as a modern state (i.e. a neoliberal state). On the other hand, I want to illustrate and underline, as Michel Foucault states, that power is not homogeneous and total. In the attempts to govern Wadi Araba as a govern space, its habitants will not let them be subjugated. Every intervention to implement a development project will cause a reaction.

Despite the existence of an extended tradition of research (mainly within anthropology) that is concerned with the relation between the notions of culture, development and governmentality, the contribution of this dissertation is to introduce this interrelationship further into the political sciences. I describe this doctorate as a political cultural critique. The notion of culture is largely absent from the political sciences but is, as I argue throughout the dissertation, crucial to understand the social and political implications of the discourses and practices of development and state formation. The use of the idea of culture as a tool of power has been significant in the history of the state formation of Jordan. The choice of Wadi Araba as context for the case studies has given the ultimate opportunity to illustrate the strategies of culturalisation in the development of a political formation as Jordan. Research related to Wadi Araba has been predominantly situated in the field of archaeology, which has delivered some very interesting work. However, anthropological and political studies have

been limited. The doctorate is in this regard equally an original contribution to the already existing literature.

Besides an extended literature study, which was rather multi-disciplinary, fieldwork was conducted as well. Spread over four years, twelve months of research has been conducted in Jordan. During the field research, predominantly (semi-structured) interviews were done with actors related to the different cases. The interviews were of crucial importance to complement the existing literature concerning Wadi Araba. The fieldwork data could be abstracted from a reality that is rather unique.

Four years of research have resulted in a dissertation that is divided, besides a general introduction and methodology chapter, in four central chapters. These four chapters illustrate together past and current initiatives that have created a space for development planners and Jordanian state to control and manage a targeted group of the population (i.e. inhabitants of Wadi Araba).

The introduction elaborates on the aforementioned three points and indicates the broader theoretical framework. The methodological chapter brings theory on methodology together with the process that the research has followed and has developed during the four years. The next chapter briefly elaborates on the development of Jordan from a newly independent state to a neoliberal state. The emphasis is on the use of difference – expressed in cultural terms – between the population as a ‘tool’ to identify itself as a state and to be placed on the international map. In this chapter the notion of ‘the idea of culture’ borrowed from Don Mitchell. The following chapter relates to the previous as it illustrates how the use of cultural difference has been incorporated in concrete development initiatives through a simultaneous representation of a (fantasised) landscape and community. Housing and agriculture are used as concrete examples. In the third main chapter the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature, a Jordanian nature organisation is the central case. The organisation experiences a lot of protest from the local population when the RSCN tries to implement a new project. The protest is translated as ignorance or lack of scientific knowledge of the local inhabitants. The degradation of the environment is from this perspective due to the locals. The chapter analyses why despite the attempts to turn towards a participatory approach RSCN keeps on encountering resistance. In the final main chapter, I look into the megalomaniac water conveyor that will connect the Red Sea with the Dead Sea. Jordan, Palestine and Israel have launched the project in 2005. It could bring salvation for the shrinking Dead Sea, provide the needed fresh water and be a step closer to regional peace. The water conveyor has been

presented as pure technological. However, in the chapter I try to illuminate the political and social meaning of the conveyor for Jordan and particularly for Wadia Araba.

Economic and infrastructural development should give Wadi Araba a push towards modernity. Housing, agriculture, tourism or nature conservation are planned and executed as if they are empty of social and political meaning. With this dissertation I show that these initiatives do not only bring houses or roads, but they also create opportunities for development planners and government to manage and control the targeted population. With the construction of a new road connecting the southern villages with the capital, the organisation of agriculture, the distribution of houses to the nomadic population, instalment of protected areas etc. the area and its habitants are connected to a powerful system that steers their lives in a particular direction, mainly away from the 'life style' they live today. One of the few places left for 'the Bedouin culture' is in tourism as living heritage. Despite the attempts to 'steer' people, there has grown a stronger dynamic of reaction and counter-projects.





## Dutch summary

Deze scriptie gaat na in welke mate ‘het idee van cultuur’ aanwezig is geweest en nog steeds is vandaag in het Jordaanse staatsvormingsproces en de daar aan gerelateerde politiek van ontwikkeling. De casussen die de ruime onderzoeksvraag illustreren situeren zich in Wadi Araba. Wadi Araba is één van de zuidelijke subdistricten van Jordanië dat zich uitstrekt langs de grens met Palestina/Israël ten zuiden van de Dode Zee. De meerderheid van de inwoners zijn (gevestigde) Bedoeïen die een zevental dorpen bewonen.

Het doctoraat is gebouwd rond drie stellingen. Als eerste stel ik dat door de naturalisatie van de notie cultuur er een dichotomie gecreëerd is tussen een genormaliseerde perceptie van ‘leven’ en het leven van de inwoners van Wadi Araba als a-normaal. Deze dichotomie wordt mede staande gehouden door bepaalde ontwikkelingsinitiatieven. Ten tweede onderschrijf ik het idee dat het domein van ontwikkeling een praktijk van *governmentality* is. Als derde en laatste stelling argumenteer ik dat een plaats/gebied in de marge van de staat, zoals Wadi Araba, onontbeerlijk is voor een beter begrip van staatsvorming en politiek van ontwikkeling. Vertrekkende van deze drie stellingen, hanteerde ik de noties ontwikkeling, cultuur en *governmentality* als drie centrale sleutelwoorden.

Dit onderzoeksproject heeft ook een tweevoudige doelstelling; enerzijds wil ik aantonen dat ontwikkelingsprojecten in Wadi Araba een bepaalde blauwdruk bevatten die aanduidt hoe een ‘degelijk’ leven geleid moet worden. De levenswijze van de lokale Bedoeïen wordt als niet-modern beschouwd en als een hindernis voor Jordanië om als een moderne staat erkend te worden. Anderzijds wil ik aangeven dat, zoals Michel Foucault stelt, dat macht niet homogeen en allesoverheersend is. In de poging om Wadi Araba als *governable space* te besturen, laten de betrokken inwoners zich niet onderwerpen. Bij elke interventie om een project te implementeren zal er reactie zijn.

Ondanks de reeds bestaande en uitgebreide traditie van onderzoek (hoofdzakelijk in antropologie) naar de relatie tussen de noties cultuur, ontwikkeling en *governmentality* draagt dit doctoraat bij door deze relatie verder te introduceren in de politieke wetenschappen. Ik omschrijf deze studie als een politiek culturele kritiek. De notie cultuur is in de discipline van politieke wetenschap quasi afwezig. Ik argumenteer doorheen het doctoraat dat deze notie cruciaal is om de sociale en politieke implicaties van een discours omtrent ontwikkeling en de reële ontwikkelingsprojecten te begrijpen. Het gebruik van het idee van cultuur als een instrument van macht, is heel ingrijpend geweest in de geschiedenis van de staatsvorming van Jordanië. De keuze van Wadi Araba als context voor de casestudies heeft in het

bijzonder de mogelijkheid gegeven om de strategie van culturalisatie in de ontplooiing van een politieke formatie als Jordanië aan te tonen. Onderzoek omtrent Wadi Araba is voornamelijk gesitueerd in archeologie. Antropologische en politieke studies zijn zeer beperkt, het doctoraat is in dit opzicht een originele bijdrage aan de bestaande literatuur.

Voor het onderzoek werd naast een uitgebreide literatuur studie die vrijwel multidisciplinair was, ook veldonderzoek uitgevoerd. Verspreid over vier jaar werd er twaalf maanden onderzoek gedaan in Jordanië. Tijdens het veldonderzoek werden er hoofdzakelijk (semi-structurele) interviews afgenomen met actoren die gerelateerd waren aan de verschillende casussen. Deze interviews waren van cruciaal belang om de beperkte bestaande literatuur met betrekking tot Wadi Araba aan te vullen. Vanuit het veldonderzoek kon er unieke data verzameld worden vanuit een realiteit.

Vier jaar onderzoek hebben geleid tot een doctoraat dat opgedeeld is - naast een algemene inleiding en methodologie - in vier hoofdstukken die de kern van het doctoraat vormen. De vier hoofdstukken samen illustreren historische en hedendaagse initiatieven die ruimte hebben gecreëerd voor ontwikkelingsplanners en de staat om een bepaalde doelgroep in de populatie (inwoners van Wadi Araba) te beheren en te controleren. In de inleiding wordt er dieper ingegaan op de reeds vernoemde drie stellingen en wordt het theoretische kader toegelicht. Het methodologische hoofdstuk brengt theorie en de wijze waarop het onderzoek is uitgevoerd samen. Het eerste kernhoofdstuk doorloopt (summier) de ontplooiing van Jordanië als een onafhankelijk staat tot een neoliberale staat. De nadruk ligt op hoe het uitspelen van cultureel verschil in de bevolking het mogelijk maakte om Jordanië op de kaart te plaatsen. Dit hoofdstuk introduceert tevens 'de idee van cultuur' ontleend van Don Mitchell. Het volgende hoofdstuk sluit hier bij aan door aan te tonen dat de nadruk op verschil in culturele termen ook in reële ontwikkelingsinitiatieven geïncorporeerd wordt in een simultane representatie van (*fantasised*) landschap en 'gemeenschap'. Huisvesting en agricultuur zijn hierbij concrete voorbeelden. Een derde hoofdstuk zoomt verder in op de Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature, een Jordaanse natuurorganisatie. De organisatie ervaart veel protest van de lokale bevolking bij de uitvoering van hun conserveringsprojecten. Het protest wordt veelal vertaald in als onwetendheid van de bevolking en degradatie van de natuurlijke omgeving is daaruit volgend verweten aan de lokale inwoners. Dit hoofdstuk gaat na hoe ondanks de pogingen om tot een participatieve strategie over te gaan, de RSCN steeds weerstand ondervindt. In het vierde en laatste hoofdstuk wordt het megalomane waterproject dat de Rode Zee met de Dode Zee verbindt toegelicht. Het project dat in 2005 werd gelanceerd door Jordanië, Israël en Palestina zou een redding voor de krimpende Dode Zee kunnen betekenen, voorzien in het nodige

zoetwater en een mogelijke stap voor regionale vrede inhouden. Het project wordt als puur technologisch omschreven. In dit hoofdstuk wordt getracht de politieke en sociale betekenis van de water conveyor voor Jordanië en Wadi Araba in het bijzonder aan te tonen.

Economische en infrastructurele ontwikkeling zou Wadi Araba een duw moeten geven richting 'moderniteit'. Huisvesting, agricultuur, toerisme of natuurconservering worden gepland en uitgevoerd alsof ze geen sociale en politieke betekenis hebben. Met dit doctoraat toon ik aan dat de initiatieven niet alleen huizen en wegen brengen, maar dat ze ook de betrokken bevolking trachten in te sluiten in een machtsysteem dat hen probeert weg te sturen van hun hedendaagse levenswijze. 'Dé Bedoeïen cultuur' kan enkel nog plaats gegeven worden als (levend) erfgoed, al dan niet tentoongesteld voor toeristen. Ondanks de pogingen tot 'bijsturen', is er de dynamiek aangegroeid van reactie en eigen initiatieven.



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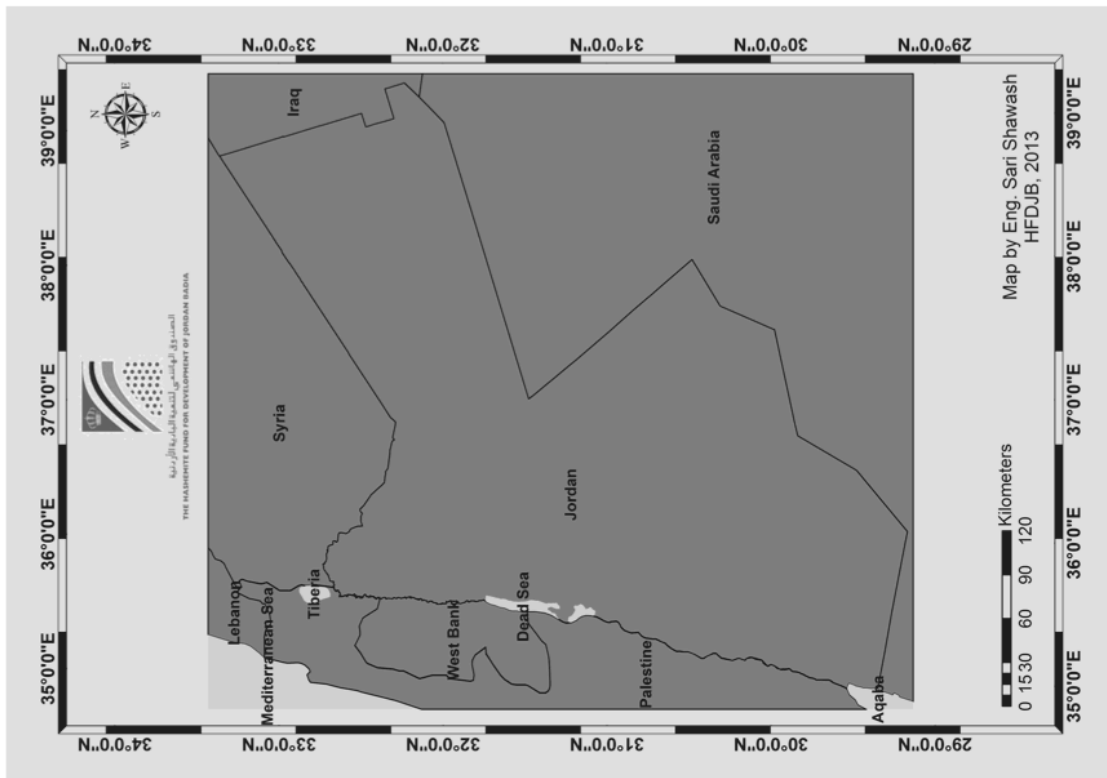
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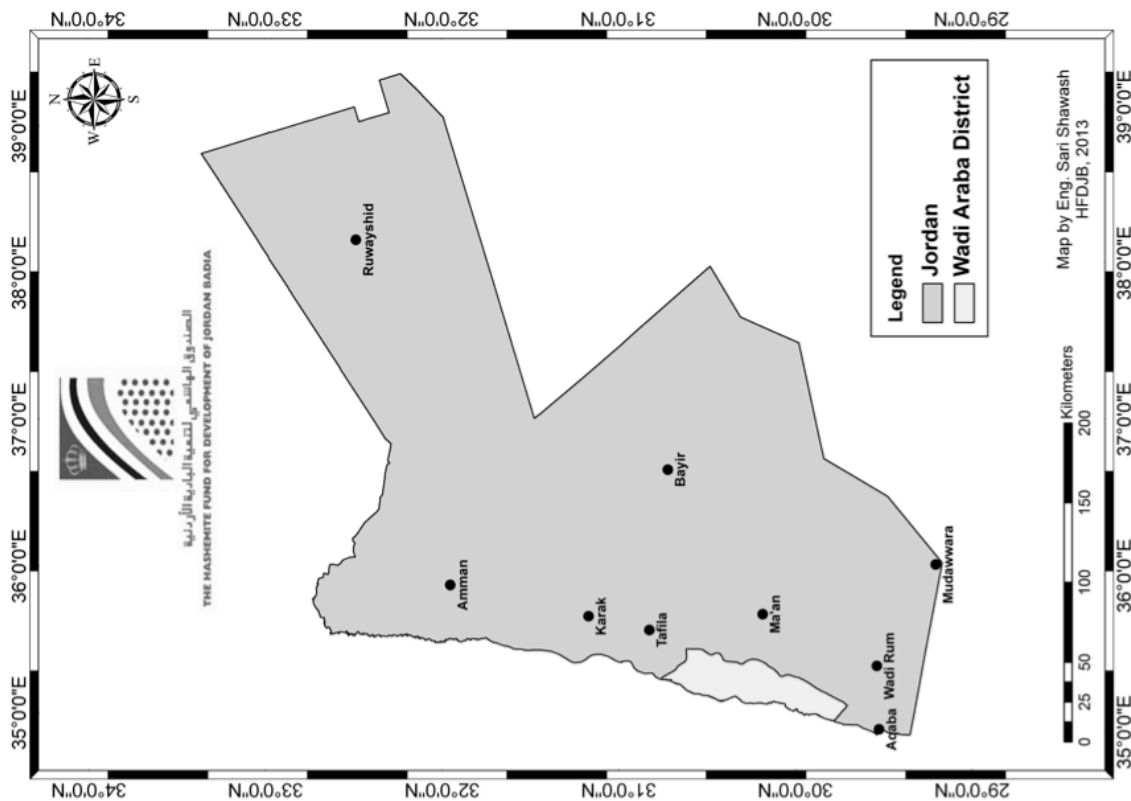




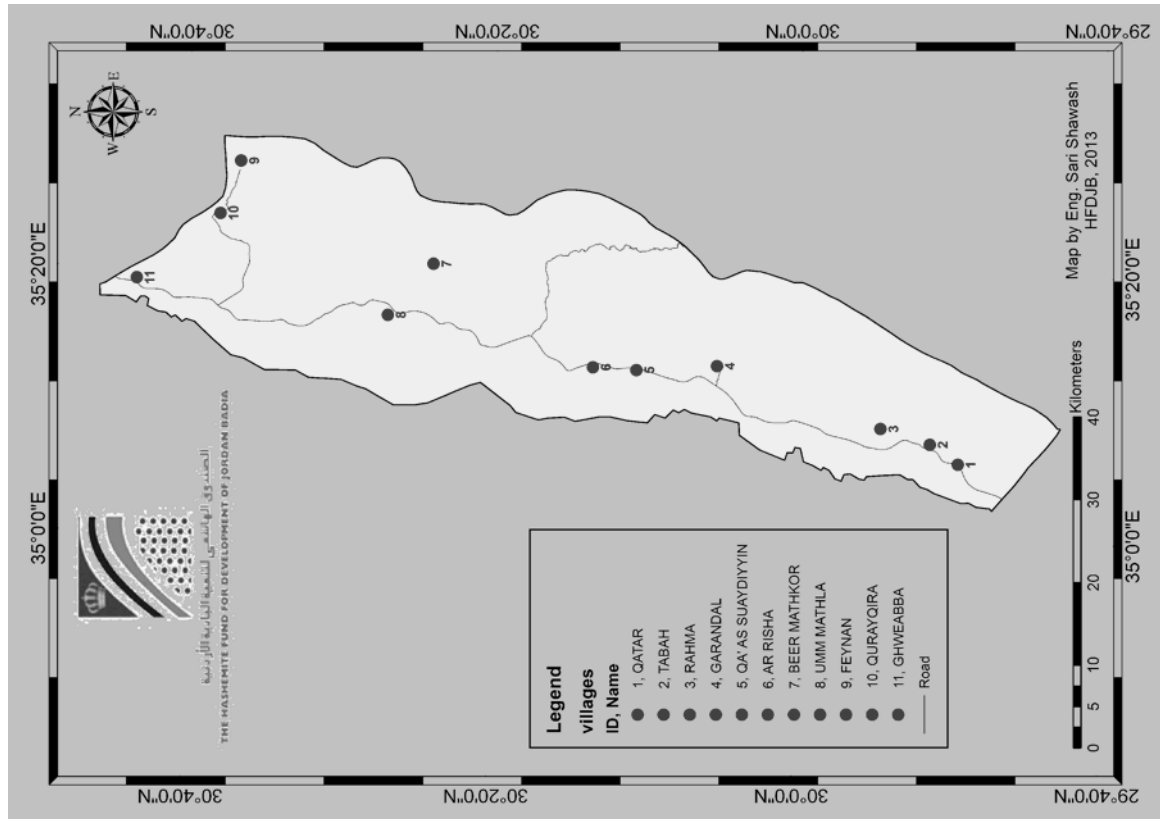
## Maps



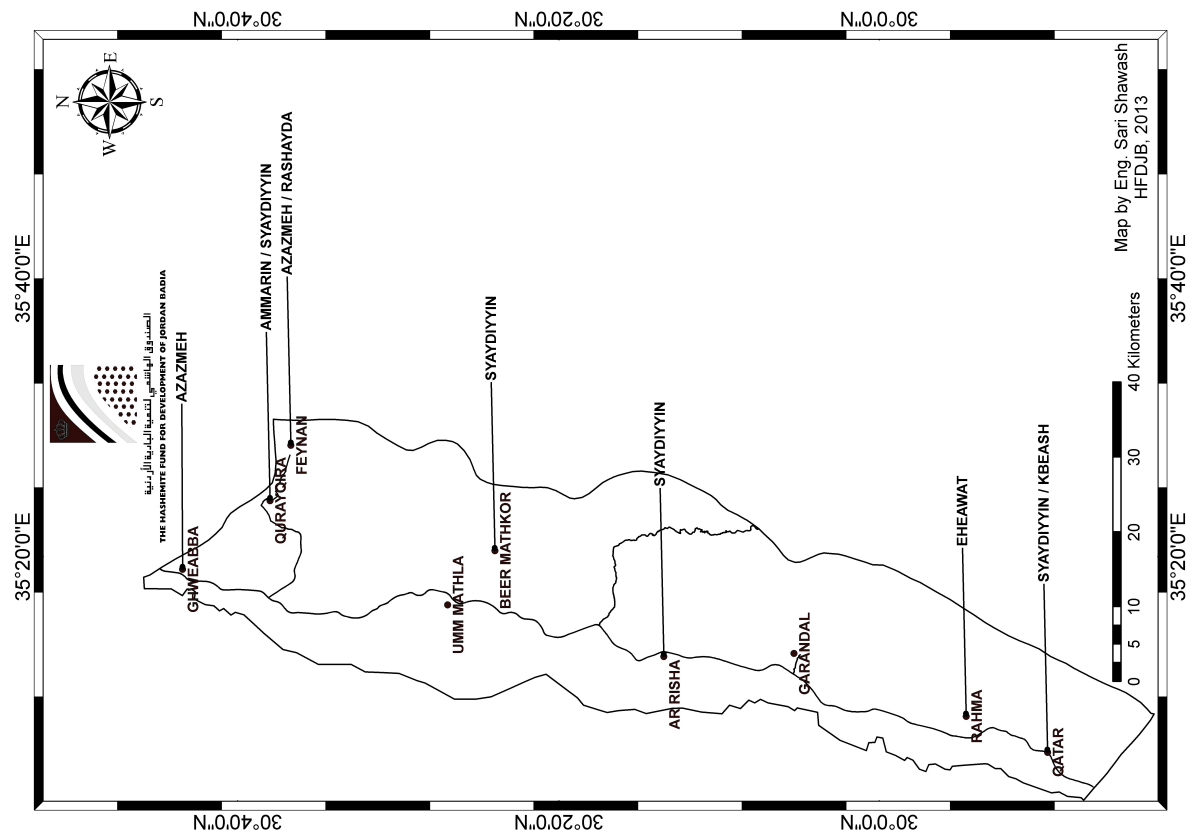
Map 1: Jordan in the region



Map 2: Wadi Araba located in Jordan



Map 3: Villages of Wadi Araba



Map 4: Tribes in relation to villages

## List of abbreviations

- ASEZA: Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority
- FAO: Food and Agriculture Organisation
- FTA: Free Trade Agreement
- GEF: Global Environmental Facility
- IEM: Integrated Ecosystem Management
- ILO: International Labour Organisation
- IMF: International Monetary Fund
- INGO: International Non-Governmental Organisation
- IUCN: International Union for the Conservation of Nature
- JD: Jordanian Dinar
- JOHUD: Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development
- JRF: Jordan River Foundation
- JRSP: Jordan Red Sea Project
- JVA: Jordan Valley Authority
- JVC: Jordan Valley Commission
- MC: Mercy Corps
- MOPIC: Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation
- NGO: Non-Governmental Organisation
- PRA: Participatory Rural Appraisal
- QIZ: Qualified Industrial Zone
- RONGO: Royal Non-Governmental Organisation
- RSCN: Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature
- SA: Social Assessment
- SAP: Structural Adjustment Program
- SCA: Special Conservation Area
- TOR: Terms of Reference
- USAID: United States Agency for International Development
- UN: United Nations
- USD: United States Dollar

- WHO: World Health Organisation
- WTO: World Trade Organisation

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For Leonie, our future.



## I General introduction

### 1.1 On the question of culture

Today the powers attributed to globalisation evoke wonder. How will the world evolve? How should or can we respond to it? How can the globe look different? At first sight it has grown into 'a world where borders and boundaries have become increasingly porous, allowing more and more peoples and cultures to be cast into intense and immediate contact with each other' (Inda & Rosaldo, 2002: 2). The image of a hyper-connected world has driven theorists to formulate hypotheses on clashes between cultures, the homogenisation of different cultures and the rule of one dominant culture. Such theories present a range of diverse images and sketch different futures. And while some may envision the death of anthropology itself as a discipline distinct from sociology, still they all centralise the notion of culture in their approach to global change.

Traditionally, anthropological research as directed by Tylor was dedicated to the production of knowledge with regard to culture. Some of this knowledge ultimately found its way to non-academic areas and became employed for purposes other than further research and our intellectual quest to know ourselves. In this development, it was not concrete knowledge on any specific culture that was utilised, but rather a particular mode of thinking about culture. Early on, in nineteenth century anthropology, peoples were classified in biological terms, their culture particulars recorded on a schema of human development in which ethnologists and their human science studied the lowest level, the 'primitive' and its 'savages.' The classification assumed to rank individual cultures on the racial ladder of evolution, a system of classification which – when it did not romanticise the state of nature as a golden age – was premised on the advance of Man. This evolutionary thesis of civilisation underwrote and sometimes materially supported the right of and need for the colonial powers to intervene and contribute to the upward movement of the inferior culture. The main thrust of the anthropological discipline, however, was to put aside the biological approach of scientific racialism to cultural differences, and redirect focus toward possible environmental, social and historical dimensions that could explain the variety of human socio-cultures (Wright, 1998: 8). Although this tried to counter the racial determination thesis, the cultural relativism of Franz Boas that emerged was later itself to become subject to critique: it made societal cultures bound to a particular place and time, thereby denying their dynamism and lack of restriction to territory. The loss of interest in the story of man's dispersal (the dehistoricisation of anthropology) and compartmentalisation of ethnology (Malinowskian immersion into the life of a single tribe) led to a lack of cultural meta-analysis, one might argue, or a sublimation of



the assumption of Western superiority. There thus emerged a view of culture perceived as more progressive and with an essentially open perspective but towards what would still, however, be described as 'other cultures'.

Just as colonial projects adopted the biological determination of cultures, the more relativistic approach to culture became similarly incorporated in discourses supporting a variety of political projects. Susan Wright (1998) refers, for example, to the New Right under Thatcher and later conservatives and to the development sector of the last decades as two domains where this new approach has been incorporated with different (political) aims. The latter example of the paradigm of development and the way culture is used to describe or manage a reality is a major theme in this thesis. It is not a little ironic that the language of difference developed to counter racism and think beyond the world as a tapestry of distinct cultures was reworked into an 'essentialist concept to reassert boundaries' and protect nationalised identities (Wright, 1998: 10).

Employing a similar language, Samuel Huntington's work makes a bridge from political science to the case of development. Although Huntington also recognises that cultures are not restricted to nations, crucially, he distinguishes boundaries between seven or eight civilisations, which he perceives as the highest cultural entities. These boundaries are drawn based on fundamental differences that have grown through history, and now that the world is becoming smaller he observes a more intense inter-civilisation interaction. According to Huntington this will increase awareness both of the differences between the civilisations and of the commonalities within them (Huntington, 1993: 25). Due to this interaction, the non-Western civilisations become more modern, but do and will not *become* Western, as their values and interests are just too different. To protect itself, the Western civilisation will have to 'maintain its economic and military power' (Huntington, 1993: 49).

Huntington does not specify what culture means to him in the *Clash of Civilisations*, but in a later (edited) work he does define it as a set of values. Different cultures, he asserts, have different values, and these values help or hinder cultures in respect of human progress. Without too much explanation, Huntington concludes that Ghana's culture has prevented it from developing like South Korea: 'South Koreans valued thrift, investment, hard work, education, organization and discipline. Ghanaians had different values. In short, cultures count' (Huntington, 2000: xiii). This whole book comprises works by authors who clearly support the idea that culture counts in the progress of human development. Daniel Etounga-Manguelle, for example, wonders whether what Africa actually needs is a cultural adjustment program. The diversity of the African continent is recognised, but the differences considered

superficial compared to the underlying foundation of shared values, attitudes and institutions (Etounga-Manguelle, 2000: 67).

Huntington doubts that Africa can count as a civilisation, but Etounga-Manguelle does not, defining it as a single culture that is 'contaminated' with characteristics (time attitude, lack of structure, animism, etc.) that prevent it from moving into modernity:

If Europe, that fragment of earth representing a tiny part of humanity, has been able to impose itself on the planet, dominating it and organizing it for its exclusive profit, it is only because it developed a conquering culture of rigor and work, removed from the influence of invisible forces. We must do the same. (Etounga-Manguelle, 2000: 77)

The new rhetoric on culture as dynamic and territorially unfixed thus found its way to a discourse that assumes the same assumption of (increased) cultural interaction and cultural specificities, but applies them in the service of cultural difference as an argument that differentiates between rates of success and ultimately styles of 'human development'. Development emerged as a global concern in the decades after World War II, when international development institutions such as the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (the former World Bank) and the International Monetary Fund were founded through the process initiated by the Bretton Woods Conference. Throughout the post-war decades, there was a continuous and very conscious (re)thinking of how the difference between the developed and undeveloped/underdeveloped (the so-called 'first' and 'third' worlds) came about and how the gap between them could be bridged. Porter (1995) refers to Marx to suggest that the notion of development was already adopted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, whereby 'development referred to a historical process that "progressed" without being consciously willed by anyone' (Porter, 1995: 66). During the colonial period in the 1920s, Porter continues, the idea became firmly established that progress to a more advanced stage (modernisation) emerges through alleviating constraints.

The 'development thinking' that became established as the international norm during the second half of the twentieth century thus inherited the assumption of cultural difference and level as an anthropological given with social implications implying a political project. The main critique of this work is directed towards the idea that it is appropriate (or even possible, let alone natural) to make a distinction between people (tribes, villages, nations, countries, etc.) that are developed and those that are not. It starts from a rejection of the notion that a standard is set and to reach the standard certain constraints will have to be lifted. Essentially, the argument is that out of the culture discourse, there grew an emphasis on values inherent

to certain cultures that prevented proper development of other cultures. As such, studies of 'other cultures' and development discourse and practice meet in a particular way.

More recently, in the dominant development institutions over the last two or three decades, there has been an evolution toward being 'culture sensitive', at least in the discourses targeting people and groups with which the institutions have partnerships and which are thus taken into consideration from a cultural perspective. A UNESCO document on culture and development from 1996, for example, reads as an internal critique on how, in the past, development institutions had failed to take into account people or cultures and how they did not recognise the friction this created. Indeed, the document appears as an attempt to contribute to a critical approach of what development means and has contributed/failed to do. However, even though there is an attempt, it fails to see how 'the flows of creativity that it associates with vigorous "cultures" is a product of continuous assertion of the power to define in a political process involving local, national and international actors' (Wright, 1998: 12).

Manifestly, even 'progressive' approaches of culture may be power-blind, as it were – which brings us to the main arguments to be addressed in this dissertation. The *idea* of culture, for example in Huntingtonian terms, operates not only in a discursive manner but also in professional (through political and social actors) and popular approaches to 'other cultures' as applied in a grounded reality. The emphasis on the idea itself of culture is based on Don Mitchell's (1995) work. I would not go so far as Mitchell and state that 'there is no such (ontological) thing as culture (Mitchell D., 1995:103)', but I do follow his idea that there is a very powerful *idea* of culture. Mitchell refers to the 'phantom nature' (Mitchell D., 1995:104) of culture as that which gives power to the idea (and thus, as he argues, effects its reification). In this thesis, I will also look at how culture – in any of its interpretations – has become a naturalised concept in the realm of development and a necessity in the process of state (c.f. nation) formation. Specifically, I illustrate how the use of 'the idea of culture' has been very present and effective in the case of Jordanian state formation and the interrelated politics of (Jordanian) development implemented in the area of Wadi Araba, a Bedouin area in southern in Jordan.

I use the notion of the *politics of development* in terms of the strategies employed to push Jordan along its path of state formation and later attempts to 'catch up with the global developed world'. Within these strategies the cultural discourse has been adapted during successive decades. Also, the many adaptations of the idea of culture that formed or even reified a Jordanian culture since the early years of the kingdom can be traced. In this work, I will not analyse what *real* 'Jordanian' or 'Bedouin' culture is or is not, but focus rather on how

the idea of culture is deployed by different actors. As the dissertation title indicates, the ultimate aim is to analyse how the idea of culture within the politics of development contributes to the creation of Wadi Araba as 'governable space(s)' during the period of the state formation of Jordan.

I discuss my research in Wadi Araba along the lines of three propositions:

- The naturalisation of the notion of culture has created a dichotomy between a normalised perception of life and the life of people in Wadi Araba as a-normal or a-civic;
- Development is an act of governmentality;
- 'Out-of-the-way places' like Wadi Araba are important for an understanding of broader processes of state formation and the politics of development.

## **1.2 The Jordanian issue of culture**

The research for this dissertation started with a focus on current and proposed projects that have been framed in terms of development or progress for Jordan. Four case studies form the main part of the dissertation. These are separate, discrete cases, yet also linked to each other. The first project I looked into was a proposed water conveyor that would connect the Red Sea with the Dead Sea to save the Dead Sea and provide the needed fresh water for the regional partners. The water conveyor is primarily just a technological intervention, but with a rationale based on and consequent attention thus paid to its potential environmental and social implications. This project, located in Wadi Araba, led to the second case, which focuses on nature conservation. This is an example of a programme described in terms of participation or partnership with the affected local communities – here, with an environmental dimension, related to designated 'protected' or 'special conservation areas'.

At first sight these two projects have little in common besides their location in the Wadi Araba area and environmental dimension. What brings them together from my perspective is that they both come with a certain 'design for life'. The implementation of both projects would i) connect Jordan to an international level of technological initiatives in an environmental context, in a manner that ii) reflects a worldview of how people in Jordan could and should develop their ways of life. Initially, as the first focus points of research, I questioned whether the design of these projects and hence life might, in fact, just be due to the neoliberal path Jordan took after 1989. Where does this idea that there exists a right way of living come from? By going back in time and opening the perspective beyond Jordan, I was able to trace the politics of culturalisation throughout the evolvement of the Hashemite Kingdom.

With these researched projects located in the Bedouin area of Wadi Araba (the area generally is predominantly inhabited by Bedouins), it became difficult to ignore the gap between the discourse of the new approaches of development in terms of partnership and the projects' descriptions and implementation. The 'Bedouin culture', as I will show through the dissertation, serves at the same time both as a burden and a benefit in the vision of development for Jordan. When the fixation on the Bedouin culture became apparent during my research, I first tried to understand what it was, exactly. But by instead asking the question of the place of this culture in the formation of Jordan as a contemporary state and its related development initiatives, I found a perspective presented on the political dimension of the usage of Bedouin and Jordanian culture – that is, on the ideas of these cultures. Thus, a larger question arose as to how early development projects, such as the creation of the colonial Desert Patrol (below), link up to the conservation areas and the water conveyor. Although separated by several decades, these all seem to be apolitical initiatives involving the Bedouin settlement that have contributed to state formation and the re-articulation of Jordan. This suggests a further elaboration of the first proposition: to complete the larger project of state formation, there was a need to start from a defined, territorialised 'Jordanian culture' that could legitimise Jordan as a modern state thus be deployed as reference point to 'others'. The notion of Bedouin culture has been of great importance in that regard. It has been interesting to observe today the implications of the role of 'the Bedouin culture' in the process of state formation in Wadi Araba.

Why so much emphasis on culture? Over the course of decades, it had become natural to talk about Jordanian culture in relation to Bedouin culture. It is normal nowadays to present Bedouin culture as a window on old Jordanian traditions, a living heritage if you will. The chapters that form the main body of this dissertation address issues that can be perceived as just projects that will help Jordan and the people from Wadi Araba towards a more modern country and life. Indeed, the projects do bring houses and protect the unique environment – but they also contribute to the endurance of Don Mitchell's phantom nature of culture, thereby enabling entry of a host of power values through the politics of the dominant into policies related to the administration of territory.

### **1.3 Jordan, Wadi Araba and the aesthetic alibi**

The idea of Bedouin culture in Jordan is strongly interrelated with the idea of Jordanian culture: each is necessary to define the other. It is clear that the co-definitional culturalisation of the Bedouin population in Jordan and Jordanian inhabitants did not occur overnight.

Chapter three goes into more depth on this; here I contextualise this process with a brief introduction of Wadi Araba and Jordan.

### *1.3.1 Jordan*

Every place in the world has a history that extends far beyond the moment of its encounter by the European travellers and entanglement in Western colonial power. The same is true for the place we refer to today as the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan. Nevertheless, the history of Jordan is typically taken to start with the Mandate period, with perhaps a reference to earlier Ottoman times. This dissertation similarly starts with the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and creation of the British Mandate of Palestine/Jordan in line with the Sykes-Picot agreement of 1916. This is not to say that Jordan came into existence out of nowhere.

Various authors, such as Salam Al Mahadin (2007a, 2007b), Christopher Parker (2009) and Eugene Rogan (1994, 1999) have indicated the dynamics of the pre-Mandate period in ways beyond its Ottoman stagnation, perceived and employed only as a pass-through area en route to Mecca. Following liberation from the Crusaders, to take a meaningful though also arbitrary point in time, there was half a millennium of sugar production and caravansary construction, the strategic location of the territory between competing kingdoms and dynasties and its incorporation in the wider territorial administrations of the Mamluks (today's Syria, Egypt and Jordan),<sup>1</sup> the presence of merchants from Palestine and the creation of markets (Parker, 2009: 94), that all ultimately contributed to the country Jordan is today.

It is important to appreciate the critique of the aforementioned authors on the artificiality not only of borders but also of defining a point in time as a historical beginning. Al Mahadin refers to Rogan to summarise what this pinpointing of borders and time implies, namely, the revealing of 'the colonial convenience behind its creation' (Rogan, 1999 in Al Mahadin, 2007b: 87)<sup>2</sup>. Therefore, I deliberately choose the Mandate period as an interesting time to start precisely because it clearly takes its cue from the formation of the idea of a Jordanian culture. Pre-mandate history played a crucial role in this formation, but crucially, Al Mahadin points out, as selected role by the Hashemite rulers that emerged with the Great Arab Revolt in response to the late Ottoman oppression. The Ottoman period and first decade of the twentieth century was thus reduced to an insignificant fact for Jordan, and the time of the

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<sup>1</sup> Andy Hilton introduced me here to the importance of the area of current Jordan before the mandate period.

<sup>2</sup> Rogan refers only to the drawing of the borders that illustrate the colonial convenience. I would argue that during the period of colonial administrations, the notion of time has played a crucial role in the definition of the colonial project.

period of the Nabateans of Petra became directly linked to the Hashemite legacy in the construction of a proto-nationalist mythology (Al Mahadin, 2007b: 90).

It was a priority of the kings to rid the land of its marginal image, to do away with the stigma of being the Ottoman's desert backyard. Indeed, the Ottomans 'did not look on what we now call Jordan as a distinct administrative unit,' since rather, for them, it was a frontier zone which extended from the Hawran to the Hijaz' (Rogan, 1994: 33).

When Britain and France (with Russian collusion) divided the Ottoman Arab lands between them, the territory of today's Jordan, which came under the British Mandate, did not appear worthy of significant investment. The opportunity fell to Amir Abdullah to establish a position for himself as ruler and the country – so he had to create a *raison d'être* for the Hashemite rule, a context for his enthronement as [King Abdullah bin Al-Hussein](#) and a justification of what, as a nation, Jordan could be (Al Mahadin, 2007b: 314). A country needed to be imagined in order that it could be realised.

Besides Abdullah and the later kings, international actors have also been crucial in the establishment of a Jordanian state. Directly or indirectly these have enhanced the culturalisation and thus maintained their privileged presence in the area. The British colonials were the obviously key actor in this respect as the effective creators by its division of the Palestinian Mandate of the Transjordan emirate over which Abdullah ruled, but international (British and American) development agents were also already present in Jordan, competing against each other (Kingston, 1994). The need to establish a political apparatus centred on the Hashemites and their entourages caused the political elite to neglect the necessity of an economic and social agenda that would represent the strengths and needs of the (fragmented) Jordanian society. This gap created a reason for the United Kingdom and Point Four (the early development branch of the United States of America, later USAID) not only to maintain an imperial presence in the area but to justify its new, *developmentalist* arrival there. It is not surprising that this presence caused social friction and triggered anti-Western nationalism. By the time king Abdullah's grandson Hussein ascended to the throne, he inherited a struggle that continues today under king Abdullah II, one that involves a constant balancing act of ensuring that the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan appears legitimate to the outside world and to its internal society.

The formation of the state of Jordan and hence its identity and ascribed culture was many times subject to national and regional events that acted as causes for adaptation in the Jordanian discourse and kept the balancing act at its point. Two important examples, which

threatened this balance, were the nationalist movement that emerged in the 1950s and the civil war referred to as 'Black September' in 1970. Again, of course, these two events did not occur out of the blue. I will look at them in more detail in the third chapter and point to the issues of inclusion and exclusion that were central to them both.

Although it is easy to create the impression that the central state embodied by the Hashemite monarchy stood above the 'masses' and steered from above when things moved in the wrong direction, I agree with Parker who argues that a perspective on Jordanian state formation that starts from a state-society division will fail insofar as it cannot see the intertwinement of the two (Parker, 2004: 115). For the main part of this dissertation, development practices will be presented as examples that can show this intertwinement.

Jordan today, as a neo-liberal state, creates spaces for non-governmental/apolitical development initiatives. Housing, roads, water and electricity provision and social development were previously domains managed by the state; now they are run by NGOs, private sector or special decentralised governmental units. Nevertheless, these all link to the central government. The monarchy (in its broadest form) is represented in the projects but implementation sold as independent or apolitical. Besides the governmental involvement, the development initiatives are also strongly related to international connections. The aim of Jordan to participate in 'the global market' as a modern state is reflected in the current and historical development initiatives.

### *1.3.2 Wadi Araba*

When talking about Wadi Araba, we refer to the area south of Ghor Safi down towards the city of Aqaba. The territory stretches longitudinally for over 130 km and varies between 5km and 20 km wide. In the 2400km<sup>2</sup>, there are seven settlements; Gregra, (new) Feynan, Risha, Rahma, Bir Mathkour, Qatar and Gwaebba. in which the biggest tribes are the Sa'ydeen, Amariin, Rashayda, Ahywat and Azazme (Table 1).

Wadi Araba can be approached in many ways. It can be defined as a border area with Israel/Palestine, a Bedouin area, one of the poorest areas of Jordan, a military zone or else an area partly occupied by Israel until 1994, and, who knows, in the future, perhaps, as another development zone. Each of the definitions has left its mark and is still influential on the formation of Wadi Araba identity today. In my research on the ground, 1994 has often been mentioned as pivotal, the year Wadi Araba opened itself to the outside world. The peace treaty between Israel and Jordan was signed in Wadi Araba, and subsequently lifted



the military zoning, which certainly made the area more accessible to outsiders. But it goes without saying, of course, that Wadi Araba and its inhabitants know a much longer history than that subsequent to 1994.

**Table 1** Settlements and major tribes of Wadi Araba

Settlement	Tribe
<b>Feynan</b>	Rashayda (New Feynan) Azazme (Old Feynan)
<b>Gegra</b>	Sa'ydeen, Amariin
<b>Risha</b>	Sa'ydeen
<b>Rahma</b>	Ahywat
<b>Bir Mathkour</b>	Say'deen
<b>Qatar</b>	Say'deen, Kbeash
<b>Gwaebba</b>	Azazme

Important to note here also is that the aforementioned different descriptions of Wadi Araba describe it as a bounded and thus implicitly insular area; crucial to an understanding of the recent struggles in the area, however, are its cross-border and external connections. Only a minority of its Bedouin inhabitants continue to maintain a nomadic lifestyle, with most of the people now settled or only semi-nomadic, but the various tribes have only recently desisted from using the spaces of Wadi Araba and surrounding areas as winter/summer resting places, and they still refer to these territories as their tribal lands. And while formal, cross-border relations with Israel/Palestine and Saudi Arabia are clearly defined by the official state borders with Jordan as drawn by international agreements,<sup>3</sup> still Bienkowski (2006: 20) asserts that Wadi Araba became a political border by default.

Wadi Araba does, literally form one of the margins of Jordan. And indeed, although, in general, the Bedouin population is perceived as the core and the loyal support of the monarch and as the national symbol of Jordan (Al Mahadin 2007b), the geographical marginality of the Wadi Araba area is also reflected in the representation of the people who

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<sup>3</sup> The border with Israel/Palestine was drawn in 1946 with the independence of Jordan, based on the Mandatory border of 1923; the border with Saudi Arabia was originally drawn according to the Hida' agreement of 1925, but in 1965 the two countries agreed to redraw the border to the current line.

live in the area. The inhabitants of Wadi Araba are not part of the big influential tribes of Jordan. However, they have experienced and are experiencing the political culturalisation of being Bedouin in the continuing process of state formation. One of the main ideas in this dissertation is that the inhabitants of Wadi Araba are often *reduced* to a merely cultural area and population. The 'lifestyle' of the Bedouin population in the area appeals to the imagination: tents, shepherds moving around in the endless desert with their herds, veiled women, and men in long dresses hiding from the sun drinking tea.

The cultural representation of Wadi Araba as a geographical place and the local population in terms of 'the Bedouin' may be regarded as a construction of what W.J.T. Mitchell (2000) dubbed the 'aesthetical alibi'. In short, the alibi is formed by (false or superficial) representations of landscape that create 'a considerable power to mobilize political passions' (Mitchell W.J.T., 2000: 195). The aesthetic alibi of Wadi Araba is predominantly based on the assumption that it is an empty space, one characterised either by a pristine nature and traditional outlook or by poverty, depending on the aim of the agency communicating or marketing the image – including development projects.

This dissertation mainly focuses on Wadi Araba, but within the bigger picture of Jordan. As mentioned, the representation of Jordan has had its references as a backyard or buffer zone. Also today, Jordan is sometimes questioned as an independent state, most famously by the Zionist rational that 'Jordan is Palestine'. As a reaction, the monarchy and its entourage try to counter this, not only by emphasising the (constructed/selected) vivid history of Jordan, but also by pushing its potential as a 'modern' state. This modernity is often expressed in an infrastructural boom, the capital Amman being exemplary of the extent to which this can go. Within the discourse of modernity, nature becomes an obstacle to be contained, conceptually by reduction to the aesthetic and materially by man's domination of his environment. The last chapter of the dissertation draws on this in illustrating how Jordan tries to insert itself into the 'modern world' by fighting water scarcity with a megalomaniac billion-dollar project.

#### **1.4 Development as an act of governmentality**

The aesthetic alibi created specifically for Wadi Araba but also for Jordan in general has moved or is moving a political passion for modernity, or development. As stated above, the cases described here might be seen as mere development projects, but as the second proposition of the dissertation asserts, development is an act of governmentality. Michel Foucault's notion of governmentality refers to

...the ensemble formed by institutions, procedures, analyses and reflections, calculations, and tactics that allow the exercise of this specific, albeit very complex power that has the population as its target, political economy as its major form of knowledge, and apparatuses of security as its essential instrument. (Foucault, 2007: 108)

With his notion of governmentality, Michel Foucault offered a perspective on governance since the 19<sup>th</sup> century that brought much more into the picture than just the sovereign ruler that was external to its population and has most interest in the defence of its territory. Foucault, in his class on governmentality,<sup>4</sup> explains that since the 16<sup>th</sup> century questions have been raised about the relationship between power, people and territory. The form of governmental power has grown in different forms, like sovereignty and discipline, over the past centuries. His example par excellence is the Machiavelli's Prince, which he takes as starting point to illustrate the further 'governmentalisation' of the state. It is important to understand that this governmentalisation is not a break with sovereignty or discipline as forms of power, but that these were rather its 'initiators', which resulted in a process of governmentality whereby the populace has become the target and field of intervention.

Foucault explains the idea thus: 'What is important for our modernity, that is to say, for our present, is not then the state's takeover (*étatisation*) of society, so much as what I call the "governmentalisation" of the state' – which is not to say that the state does not matter, or is non-existent, but that it is reduced to 'a number of functions' (Foucault, 2007: 109). The limits and the survival of the state, Foucault explains, are to be understood on the basis of the general tactics of governmentality. In the case of Jordan, the state is presented as a very solid, central and individual power, but analysis of the process of its formation from the perspective of governmentality reveals this apparently well delineated state rather as a link in or expression of a broader and more historically embedded system of power relations. Within this process, the idea of culture and the notion of development are crucial.

The twin notions of development and progress are also enacted in practice (state or non-state initiated) with the aim of staying out of the political realm and focusing on the socio-economic improvement of the population. Many of today's initiatives to improve society quite deliberately try to avoid political connotation. Probably the most obvious example is the general one of neoliberalism, which encourages the retreat of politics and the domination of the market (i.e. the end of politics). Through approaching development practices with the

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<sup>4</sup> Referring to the class of 1 February 1978; in fact, he elaborates further on the issues in subsequent lectures, to the extent that 'Governmentality' might have been the better title for the series than 'Security, territory, population' (Foucault, 2007: 108).

perspective of governmentality, the political program is revealed. Here, I follow Thomas Lemke in my understanding of governmentality, that it 'deciphers the so-called "end of politics" itself as a political programme' (Lemke, 2002: 57). The approach of governmentality towards development can show us how development as such functions as a politics of truth and thereby produces 'new forms of knowledge, inventing new notions and concepts, that contributes to the "government" of new domains of regulation and intervention' (Lemke, 2002: 55). Development initiatives contribute in a variety of ways to the survival of the state within the existence of governmental power.

Within development theory and practice, I would argue that the idea of culture as portrayed by Mitchell has been vital to the rationale of intervention. In this context, I focus on the representation of Bedouin and Jordanian culture within the design of development projects. Identifying certain practices and naming or representing them as cultures 'creates partial, yet globalizing, truths' (Mitchell D., 1995: 109). These created truths are important to indicate the difference between people. Central in the formation of Jordan as a country, this has thus, and of necessity, been essential to the interrelated realm of development. Although the difference is perceived as inherent to the various cultures, and so varying in type and extent according to their specificities, some of those differences can, nevertheless, be alleviated by the right interventions – the differences, that is, between the paradigm(s) of modernity (as represented by the central authority (and development agencies) and the various others, such as the Wadi Araba Bedouin. This creation of truths with regard to culture is a strong tool in the (re-)arrangement of power relations among the relevant actors and the dichotomies of meaning and power they embody (central/peripheral, state/non-state, national/local, etc.).

The Jordan Valley has always been an important target within the development practice of Jordan. The authority in charge of the Valley, the Jordan Valley Authority (JVA), is responsible thus for the development of Wadi Araba, situated in, as part of, the larger Rift Valley, and hence a major actor for this research. The quotation below illustrates the philosophy of the JVA on the improvement of the standard of people's life stated by the (at that time) senior vice president of the JVA Dr. Munther Haddadin

Social services just touch the skin of what we are trying to do in the Jordan Valley. It's easy to build new buildings. What's more difficult is social engineering, and the objective of social development is the betterment of the human being. How do we zero in on this? Above all, it's a person's well-being, environment and way of thinking. Is it social development when a man who has always ridden a donkey one day buys a Mercedes? What about his way of thinking? How he raises his family? It's a slow process, but it can

only start by providing people with the most basic social services like schools, clinics, roads, electricity, water and houses. Then maybe in a year or two, they add a cultural centre, or a small sport complex. Things begin to change. Young people study new ideas. The entire village structure starts to loosen up. A rigid society starts to change... "Social development is people's attitudes," and it's not easy to change attitudes quickly. How do we speed this up? The only thing we can do is plan and implement to provide the services that in turn give people the ability to decide about their own lifestyle. They begin to have a choice. (Khouri 1981: 226)

The Jordan Valley has been part of the Jordanian development programme since early independence, mainly due to the influx of Palestinian refugees after the Arab-Israeli war of 1948, but similar patterns can be observed in Wadi Araba over the last several decades. The general idea of the Wadi Araba initiatives is that by building schools, community centres, protected areas, roads and suchlike, the people of Wadi Araba will learn that these will change their lives to a more 'progressive way' that will leave behind some parts of the old Bedouin culture. When projects do not work out as planned or encounter problems, therefore, this is often blamed on the Bedouin culture and its people that did not use the tools offered as it should.

This refers to the design for life (above). There seems to be a general idea of what a decent life is. In 2008, for example, King Abdullah initiated a 100,000-apartment national housing initiative called 'Decent Housing for Decent Living'. Through the distribution of houses (to low-middle income families, army veterans, etc.), social and economic security would be guaranteed to the people.<sup>5</sup> The idea of a decent life was not imagined as a problematic, but rather assumed and thus introduced as an invisible value. In this dissertation, I argue that the decent life has much to do with spatial organisation and setting standards for or rather limits to what people are able to. I would call it a paradox that people are involved in development projects to improve their lives yet which also take lives out of their hands, as this process is managed between certain boundaries. Institutions such as the Jordan Valley Authority are appointed to provide 'guidelines' to people in order that they make 'right' choices:

Studies of governmentality do not assume that everything is a political activity, but political activities are also not reducible to the trinity of politics, policy and polity. Governing means creating lines of force that make certain forms of behavior more probable than others. Measuring these lines of force does not mean asking how

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<sup>5</sup> [www.kingabdullah.jo](http://www.kingabdullah.jo) (November 2013)

people actually move within them. Studies of governmentality are more interested in how people are invoked to move within these lines. (Lemke et. al., 2011: 13)

Development is thus an act of governmentality, a procedure by which people move toward, along and within the lines of prescribed behaviour (or at least, away from the proscribed). Governmentality thus takes on the function of constituting the populace, directing what it should be and not be. Governmentality is often translated as a conduct of conduct whereby the purpose of government lies in 'the welfare of the population, the improvement of its condition, the increase of its wealth, longevity, health, and so on' (Foucault 1978, in Faubion, 2000: 217). Such markers are attained, targets met, through the enablement of methodologies by the state for the realisation of empirically proven formulae that facilitate the conduct (opening of markets, medical provision, a national education system, etc.). Development programmes are situated within this general context.

Lemke's remark that 'not everything is political', is employed here as a guideline, a heuristic to keep the research focused. I agree there is little point in seeing in every plan, activity or discourse a political agenda. Nevertheless, it is certainly revealing to place certain development projects and activities within a broader frame that illustrates how people's lives are 'guided' or governed, how their conduct is conducted.

#### *1.4.1 Development and governmental spatiality or governable space*

Development discourse can do without its history but not its geography for, without geography, it would lack a great deal of its conviction and coherence. Spatial and organic images and metaphors have always been used to define what development is and does. The language of development constantly visualizes landscape, territory, area, location, distance, boundary and situation (Slater 1993, in Porter, 1995: 13).

The aesthetic alibi is a visual/material representation of a space, such as in the case of Wadi Araba. I will argue in this dissertation that this alibi is also used as a justification to intervene in the population, the change of a physical space as a means to 'improve' a population, and vice versa. Within the domain of development, one can find rationalities in the proposed project for the amelioration of the living standards of the population and at the same time improvement of their cultures (or, often today, their mentalities). Foucault (2007: 21) uses the notion of 'milieu', where I will use the concept of *landscape* to get at the entanglement of natural givens and agglomeration of individuals, houses, the social.<sup>6</sup> When we do not

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<sup>6</sup> Foucault bases his milieu on the work of Jean-Baptiste Moheau. My reference to landscape is based on the work of Tim Ingold (Chapter 4).

perceive the milieu or landscape as a pure disciplinary arena of visibility, surveillance and control, but also – as Huxley (2007: 199) points out – ‘as productive of political subjectivities and self-forming subjects’ and if ‘space is taken as integral to the exercise of power and the conduct of conducts’, then ‘spatial and environmental causalities can be examined as central elements in the thought of government’ (Huxley, 2007: 199). The production of governable subjects is inherent in the development of the modern state that focuses on the ‘improvement’ of its population – they are the means enabling this end and yet become thus the end in itself (governable subjects *are* an improved population).

The state of Jordan aims to improve its populations, to which purpose different strategies are applied to different populations and places. With the rationale of improving places and populations in a single way, according to the agreed aims of modernity, it follows that governable subjects are to be seen in a context of governable spaces. Watts (2004) explains how governable spaces are formed and remodelled on different scales (fabric, village, region, nation, etc.). In his perspective, the process of governable spaces is channelled through ‘the community’, or populace, if you will. I see Wadi Araba in terms of multiple governable spaces, because every project comes with a different rationale for improvement of the area, but always through the people of Wadi Araba who in each project embody a representation of the area.<sup>7</sup> Through the intertwinement of Wadi Araba and the people who inhabit the area, I illustrate this intertwined landscape as a governable civic space, as a governable space of nature and as a governable space of tradition, but also as a governable space within the larger, national Jordanian governable space.

Here, I argue that the notion of governable space is very important in order to go beyond the idea of space as a pure disciplinary arena, because the powers within the governable spaces are multiple, contrary to that of the (now classical) sovereign or disciplinary rule. The Jordanian state and development actors (national and international) are just part of the web of power relations – which is not to imply that the ‘locals’ (Bedouin) lose all agency in being trapped in this web. On the contrary, power means ‘that the “other” (the one over whom power is exercised) be thoroughly recognised and maintained to the very end as a person who acts; and that, faced with a relation of power, a whole field of responses, reactions, results, and possible inventions may open up’ (Foucault 1982 in Li, 2007: 276). Some of those relations and their creative effects are considered here.

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<sup>7</sup> Michael Watts refers to communities as governable spaces (see also Watts, 2004).

## 1.5 The importance of being Wadi Araba

I elaborated earlier (1.3.2) on the different representations of Wadi Araba, and noted that after 1994 the area became more accessible. Of course, the subsequent initiatives taken to improve the social and economic conditions of the area are to be seen within the context of, for example, the post-peace agreement and need for a buffer at the border. But still today, Wadi Araba and the inhabitants continue to be defined by their geographical situation, as at the margin. Much research has been done on marginal areas in the world in relation to issues like development, housing and land. The ideas most employed in guiding this research are thus heavily based on approaches that mainly flourished in the 1990s and early 2000 (e.g. Gupta & Ferguson, 1997; Tsing 1993, 1994; Das & Poole, 2004; Mitchell T., 2000).

Even though Wadi Araba is not a newly discovered place and does not have the features of a rebellious or conflict area, I remain convinced about the importance of research on 'marginal places', both in political science generally and for Wadi Araba specifically, because 'looking at the margins offers a unique perspective to the understanding of the state, not because it captures exotic practices, but because it suggests that such margins are a necessary entailment of the state, much as the exception is a necessary component of the rule' (Das & Poole, 2004: 4). This is an important argument here since it emphasises that places like Wadi Araba and its inhabitants are not disconnected islands, but rather connected to broader scales of the state and beyond, a connection, moreover, made in a way that analytically implies them to be quite the opposite of dispensable (as their marginality might seem to imply) but rather included as definitional.

For this research project, Wadi Araba is the main case study, but in a broader framing of the state formation of Jordan, which, in its turn, is not a single island but also related to different (internal and external) processes. I illustrate with this dissertation that the attempts to form an independent state like Jordan create ideas of culture that are incorporated into their development projects, with aims that apply both to Wadi Araba and Jordan as a whole. This connection to the central state can be translated as an ambiguous relation of exclusion *and* inclusion. Depending on mainly the (perceived) threats of the self-defined state, certain populations are included or excluded from what it means to be part of the heterogeneity of that state, or, in this case, what it means to be Jordan. In this respect, Wadi Araba is particularly interesting precisely for the reason that the Bedouin tribes there are not the big influential tribes close to the monarchy.



Some of the Wadi Araba tribes moved into the area only after the border with Israel/Palestine was officially ratified, while others fought on the Palestinian side during the Civil War of 1970-71 (Bocco, personal communication, 2012). As a result, these tribes have always been excluded from the privileges that other *badia*<sup>8</sup> tribes enjoyed. Nevertheless, they are Bedouin and within the current situation of Jordan they are perceived as part of the national tradition – but as not yet part of the modern society. Wadi Araba is designated as one of Jordan's 'Poverty Pockets' (Chapter 4), resulting in its formalised exclusion from 'normality'. According to Foucault, it is inherent to societies that they 'are discursively constituted through a series of normalizing judgments that are put into effect by a system of division, exclusion and oppositions' (Gregory, 1995: 457). Wadi Araba thus becomes necessary to understand the state of Jordan, but at the same time, it also serves as a landscape to illustrate how the state, within governmentality as an art of government, is limited in the governance of its own territory including Wadi Araba.

## 1.6 Dissertation outline

Above, Wadi Araba has been approached as governable space(s) wherein the idea of culture has gained a significant influence on development practices and state formation. The following chapters aim to illuminate this process of culturalisation and its final reification in certain development projects. The idea is that through grounded concrete projects, I can show the entanglement of the processes of culturalisation, development and state formation.

Although the chapters are ordered chronologically, the dissertation certainly does not present a linear narrative. Certain lines continue through time while operating as themes connecting are constantly also challenged by events. The aim is not a history of Wadi Araba and development, but to show how notions such as, here, Bedouin culture have become a (governmental) rationale for development interventions, and to suggest what difference this makes.

The next chapter focuses on the importance of *the idea of culture* in the continuous process of the formation of Jordan from a mandated state (British imperial protectorate) until the emergence of the contemporary country as neoliberal state. In illustrating the historical process of the idea of Bedouin or Jordanian culture, I argue also that this idea was adapted over time according to specific events and strategic choices. In the attempt to constitute

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<sup>8</sup> Badia is an Arabic reference for desert, although the different badia areas (the majority of land surface in Jordan is badia) in Jordan have some different characteristics from a desert.

Jordan as a legitimate presence in the area, there was the need to create a political community that would be identified and identify itself as Jordanian. As Jordan has always been (as today) subject to outside (requested) interference as well as internal challenges, its rulers employed a fluctuating discourse regarding what or who was part of the Jordanian political community and what/who was not. In this chapter, I concretise the situations that emphasised a discourse of difference between populations with the aim of enabling the further development of a modern state. I try to provide insights into the early moments of the moulding of the idea of culture, which later in history was never so pronounced but nonetheless essential in the governance of Jordan and strongly affected the area of Wadi Araba and its inhabitants.

Through time, the idea of culture became settled as practice, so this it is not only a discursive matter. The following chapter elaborates further on the *design for life* and how the ideas of what a civic or decent life is becomes integrated into concrete development projects. Initiatives such as housing for a nomadic population or agricultural activities for the poorest in a country can be observed as very concrete and necessary projects. These are very specific constructions, but here I want look beyond and see what the rationales are for implementation and how the material intervention is reflected in the *representation of the targeted population*. This chapter also introduces the ideas of *fantasised landscape* and *fantasised community* to go beyond the existing notion of imagined communities. During the research, I observed that it was not so much a matter of imagining 'the Bedouin', but rather one of how s/he should be and how s/he could be modelled. This chapter is an illustration of how development operates as an act of governmentality; through interventions directed on the population (in this case nomadic/Bedouin), the idea was to create a state (Jordan) with a modern outlook, yet within the infrastructure of, for example, housing, is realised a materialisation of the cultural representation of nomads or Bedouin as not civic.

Representations do create truths. In Chapter 4, these truths are related to the issue of nature conservation. The Dana nature reserve extends from the highland ranges on the eastern escarpment of the Jordan Rift Valley and into Wadi Araba. The perceived success of the Dana biosphere conservation area (an initiative of the Royal Society of the Conservation of Nature) has led to proposals for a wider set of proposed nature areas in Wadi Araba. Although these preservation initiatives are framed in a participatory rhetoric, they encounter great resistance from local populations. The local population (undifferentiated, as a mass, an other) has been held responsible for the degradation of the environment, and the recent cancellation of new nature projects is attributed to the so-called ignorance of the locals. The RSCN is an especially interesting illustration of the tensions that exist in the narratives

through which the scales of local and global are made and reified and how conservation as a form of development contributes to the creation of truths. The truth/knowledge nexus that support the implementation of the conservation projects is perceived as scientific knowledge that places the local population out of place and even out of time, and thus out of power (their knowledge is 'traditional' as opposed to 'modern' or scientific knowledge, and thus devalued).

In the final chapter of the main body (prior to the conclusion), I focus on a case study that actually does not yet exist, namely the water conveyor that will, supposedly, connect the Red Sea with the Dead Sea. The project has three purposes and is planned as a cooperative venture with Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories. It is presented as a win-win project for all: environmentally, it is as a solution for the shrinkage of the Dead Sea; economically, it will provide water and electricity (and in the future will enable the development of tourism, agriculture, industry and even new cities in the area); and politically, it will provide a framework for cooperation with neighbouring countries. The project is to be supported by the World Bank. This is not considered important here for discussion of its financial or environmental feasibility, but rather, in a focus on how the project and the visions it projects mobilise actors and resources.

Jordan has a history of plans with regard to water infrastructure that have never materialised, but all located in a certain political time with particular political aims. Jordan ranks fourth on the ranking of water-scarce countries in the world.<sup>9</sup> It is therefore no coincidence that the government pushes forward this conveyor with some urgency that otherwise could risk severe political consequences. Indeed, the prediction of water wars is never far away. The influx of neighbouring populations over decades due to conflicts (hundreds of thousands of people from Syria, at the time of writing) is incorporated in the discourse of necessity. The message is that Jordan cannot longer provide water for everybody if the demographic pressure continues. With the conveyor project (in whatever final form), the government tries to maintain the stability of its internal and external balance. Internally, the provision of water can ease the tension between different populations; externally, this represents an effort to work with two parties that are strongly related to Jordan but in conflict with each other. Also today, the mentioned conveyor is not the only option for a water conveyor. The existence of multiple plans and their effects already on the ground afford insights that go beyond the technical specifications of the pipeline.

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/jordan/overview> (November 2013)

As the final, General Conclusions indicates, the connection between the four chapters is not just a place called Wadi Araba that is situated at the border with Israel/Palestine. It is also the culturalised perspective of Jordan and Wadi Araba that has made it possible to develop plans for a 'better' life in the Kingdom of Jordan and the southern *badia*.



## II. Methodology

### 2.1 Back to Back

This research began four years ago in Ghent. The news that a water conveyor would be constructed from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea triggered the scientific curiosity of one of my supervisors and encouraged me to look into it. At that point I did not know that the Wadi Araba would become the main (geographical) focus of my research. My initial idea was to compare the development process of the northern and southern part of the Jordan Rift Valley, referred to as the Jordan Valley, the Southern Ghors and Wadi Araba with the aim to illustrate broader development 'trends' in Jordan and to analyse the politics of development applied to the area that forms the boarder with Israel/Palestine. As I explain in greater detail below, that the research did not proceed in arbitrary ways but my research plan remained a continuous work in progress. Not only the geographical focus changed, but also my topics and themes of interest and even my way of doing research. I was always conscious of my methodological choices but also engaged in no small amount of improvisation along the way. (Cerwonka & Mallki 2008)

At the beginning of research everything seems to be clear and a black spot at the same time. You have no idea how the research will go, but on the other hand in the classes on methodology you learned a bit the steps and methods you can apply. With still a blurry research topic I tried to find and select interesting and relevant literature for the future development of the project. A first introduction with the 'field' arrived fast and challenged directly all pre-formed ideas of how to do research. I was armed with ideas about how to enter a field with open or semi-structured question lists for interviews, possible participatory observation, or even going native and extending my project to a multi-sided ethnography and so on. On my first visit to Jordan, I frequently accompanied a colleague on interviews, and worked with structured questions (albeit with a more open style) to touch upon broader themes that might be useful in defining my own research project. I remember being mainly frustrated that I did not get the 'right answers' (i.e. juicy quotes) from respondents. I reassured myself that once back home it would all become clear to me by looking at the first experience from a distance. New literature and planning a next field trip would make my circle go round and form my research bit by bit as it should.

Things did not become clearer at home and the circle went everywhere but round. Although methodology should be a guideline to read the script of a research, I experienced that it is mainly a tool to read afterwards the collected information and reflect on the research

process. It will always encounter issues that are not written down in a script. My methodology chapter will be about choices and reflections, and not so much about how to start a research. Edward Said (1985) dedicated a whole book to what a beginning is and the doctoral thesis of colleague Koenraad Bogaert reassured me that even the great Giorgio Agamben stated that in most cases of social science research the thinking about method follows the practical research part (Bogaert, 2011:24).

Through the last four (almost five) years of working on my research, I frequently questioned on what I was doing. Looking back, I now see how those questions guided me through my research process. They will be the frame for this chapter. This chapter is divided in two parts: the first part addresses issues related to epistemology; while the second elaborates on the operational process of unfolding my research.

## 2.2 School's out

I am absolutely not a structuralist. Structuralism is only a means of analysis. ... I merely make use of the structuralist method to analyze all that. (Foucault 1970 in Faubion, 1994:341)

One could say that Michel Foucault was a stubborn man who did not want to carry any academic label. But his statement is in my opinion quite useful to step into the discussion on how to match discipline, method and knowledge production. I learned that there is a general consensus that the boundaries between disciplines and the traditional related methods have become interchangeable. During my research project I worked with literature coming from different disciplines, including political science, anthropology, cultural studies, geography, etc. It was the subject being addressed rather than the disciplinary that was key in choosing what to read (or not) Undeniably, my educational background in cultural and development studies has pushed me in certain directions. Almost intuitively I would argue in complete favour of an interdisciplinary approach, or at least of recognising knowledge produced by other disciplines, together with 'non-academic' knowledge. Johannes Fabian summarises it well from his anthropological point of view.

I deeply believe that a realistic view of our discipline [anthropology] must acknowledge that our kind of science is practiced in the presence of other kinds of knowledge production. These other kinds of knowledge production are not limited to other academic disciplines: they include the discursive, performative, aesthetics, and political practices of those whom we study. (Fabian, 2007:15)

It may all seem very logical to work interdisciplinary or at least to have an open view on other ways of knowledge production. But it appears that there still exists a need to position and to name your research within a certain discipline, method and school (i.e. Marxist, post-modern, (post)structuralism, feminism, gender studies ...). Out of a recent personal experience, I realised that in some cases for a paper to get accepted for publication the interpretation of disciplines is still taken quite strict and in my opinion rather with a narrow perspective on how one can/should organise his or her research. It is nice to see how anthropologist Liisa Malkki is concerned about her advice to - in the time – the advanced graduate student Allaine Cerwonka to incorporate ethnography in her research that was situated at a political science department. How might this interdisciplinary encouragement influence Cerwonka's position at the department, what would be at stake? As Malkki points out in her work on ethnography, besides the current trend to value interdisciplinary work, it can as well be a restriction to have access to certain academic positions.

When graduate students become job applicants in the academy, they are usually expected to hold a doctorate in the discipline to which they are applying. One of the most expedient mechanisms for reducing the pile of job applications facing a search committee is to weed out applicants with a doctorate in another discipline. The social and professional costs of doing interdisciplinary work are thus potentially very high for graduate students and untenured faculty. (Cerwonka and Malkki, 2007: 164)

Between the sympathy for a disciplinary approach towards research and the awareness that it might come with a price to pay, I tried to position my research somewhere in the middle. Although I have been in the field for almost 12 months spread over seven field visits and conducted interviews while being there, I would not describe my research as anthropological. I have also been reluctant to call my research an ethnographic study of Wadi Araba, because I am not looking at Wadi Araba as a defined 'cultural research subject' that will be described in depth. I followed projects rather than people. The projects implemented in Wadi Araba brought me as well to Amman and Aqaba. Following the description of George Marcus (1995) on multi-sited ethnography, I could relate my research to this form of ethnography or at least as a limited version of it.

It claims that any ethnography of a cultural formation in the world system is also an ethnography of the system, and therefore cannot be understood only in terms of the conventional single-site *mise-en-scene* of ethnographic research, assuming indeed it



is the cultural formation, produced in several different locales, rather than the conditions of a particular set of subjects that is the object of study.(Marcus,1995:99)

Contemporary anthropology does not limit itself to research on delimited localities, but has broadened its scope to take on themes and topics traditionally seen as the concern of other disciplines. As Marcus also states that '[Thus], fieldwork as traditionally perceived and practiced is already itself potentially multi-sited' (Marcus, 1995:100).I will come back later on the issue of fieldwork in relation to my own research. More important here is his idea that a cultural formation reflects a (certain) world system. I found a step going beyond 'localism'. However, instead of talking about a world system I would rather talk about a cultural formation within a certain worldview or 'world vision'.

As I mentioned in the introduction, this dissertation does not want to deny the existence of culture. Ortner (2005) states clearly that the concept of culture is not inherently a dangerous or conservative concept, but that one has to recognise its political value (Ortner, 2005:35). In this dissertation the emphasis is mainly on its political aspect; culture is viewed from a perspective of power, something also Ortner points to.

Thus while recognizing the very real dangers of 'culture' in its potential for essentialising and demonizing whole groups of people, one must recognize its critical political value as well, both for understanding the workings of power, and for understanding the resources of the powerless. (Ortner,2005:35)

Despite all my references to anthropological literature and certain related methods as fieldwork, I would like to position my research and dissertation as a political cultural critique. Cultural critique is again predominantly related to anthropology as it has a 'tradition' of being self-reflexive through acquired knowledge from 'abroad' and to use this knowledge to formulate a critique on a home society. (Marcus & Fischer 1999; Ortner 2005) [Anthropological] cultural critique asks questions about the cultural shaping of subjects in relation to ever changing constellations of power. With my research I ask questions about these changing constellations of power and the entanglement with subjects. It is a political cultural critique as it looks at the use of culture within political formations (which is always intertwined with subject formation). In the anthropological cultural critique the critique or questions are more addressed to other anthropological insides on culture. My critique is directed towards the insights on culture and subject formation by actors of development or state formation.

A political cultural critique creates space for at least two issues that I consider crucial for a better understanding of development initiatives. The first issue relates to Marcus' perspective on cultural formation(s) in a world system(s)/worldviews and how through analysis of a cultural formation one also analyses a particular worldview. You could go as far as Bruno Latour (1993), who wrote an ethnography on technology and science, claiming that development theory and practice can be analysed ethnographically as a cultural formation. It would contribute to David Mosse's (2005) perspective that it is more insightful to look at the process of how development initiatives work rather than if they work or not. Initiatives do not appear out of nowhere, neither are they elusive figments. They are grounded in their implementation and in their planning. As I will argue for an unbounded dynamic approach of culture, also the 'culture of development' is constantly in negotiation. Through an analysis of grounded initiatives, it is possible to shed light on a network of (conflicting) worldviews (what actually refers to the designs of life). A second issue deals with, perhaps bluntly spoken, 'counter-subject formation'. From a perspective of cultural critique one can see the political value of culture. This political value also refers to how people who are assigned to a particular culture are 'knowing subjects' (Ortner, 2005: 45) who will react if they are reduced to this particular culture. In the case of this research, people who are living in the area of Wadi Araba are often seen as a merely a cultural Bedouin without any recognition for their other cultural, political, economic or social relations.

In my continuous questioning how to position myself, I consider a political cultural critique as the best of both worlds, political science and anthropology. I tried to sketch a perspective on the creation of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, but instead of using political state theory to support empirical data, I turned towards literature and theories from predominantly researchers situated in anthropology and cultural studies. The main reason for this in-between choice was the space that becomes available for an encounter for the notions of power and culture.<sup>10</sup>

### **2.3 Governmentality as a methodological instrument**

In the edit volume 'Cultural Theory: an Anthology' the editors Szeman and Kaposy (2011) bring for the issue of 'power' some authors together that could be seen as the usual suspects such as Marx, Foucault, Deleuze, Smith, Fanon etc. In relation to culture they are a rather peculiar, nevertheless interesting choice, to underline the political value of culture. My research has been inspired especially by Foucault's work and the how it has influenced a

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<sup>10</sup> I am not claiming that this is a unique perspective and that can be found solely in a political cultural critique. Anthropological researchers as Tania Li Murray bring together the same issues of culture and power, perhaps with more emphasis cultural practices.

very diverse academic fields. Governmentality is one of Foucault's notions that was crucial for the development of my research. Governmentality is less worked out in my final dissertation than it has been a key notion in my search for literature. Mainly to approach governmentality as a methodological tool was helpful to put all the research pieces together.

I am aware that there is also literature that points at the limits of a perspective of governmentality. Tania Li who works very frequently with the notion of governmentality reveals at the same time the limits to it. Her general critique on Foucault is the seemingly unproblematic distinction between an analysis of a program and the real life that this program will affect. Foucault has been questioned on the issue that programs are not real, that they do not 'substitute for reality' and mainly his work on the Panopticon of Bentham is challenged with this critique. Foucault himself replies that 'if I had wanted to describe "real life" in the prisons, I indeed wouldn't have gone to Bentham. But the fact that this real life isn't the same thing as the theoreticians' schemes doesn't entail that these schemes are therefore utopian, imaginary, and so on. One could only think of this if one had a very impoverished notion of the real' (Foucault 1978 in Faubion, 2000 :232). The critique of Li and the reply of Foucault have been encouraging and at the same time a help to focus my own research process. Foucault's idea of power, as never total and homogenous, made Li argue that to understand the power relations within a program as the Panopticon, ethnographic research should look also at the inside of the prison - the witches' brew as Foucault refers to the inside –and at the reactions on the programs by involved actors. Power for Foucault is to be understood as:

In the first instance as the multiplicity of force relations immanent in the sphere in which they operate and which constitute their own organization; as the process which, through ceaseless struggles and confrontations, transforms, strengthens, or reverses them; as the support which these force relations find in one another, thus forming a chain or a system, or on the contrary, the disjunctions and contradictions which isolate them from one another; and lastly, as the strategies in which they take effect, whose general design or institutional crystallization is embodied in the state apparatus, in the formulation of the law, in the various social hegemonies. (Foucault 1976 in Szeman & Kapsoy, 2011 :134)

To see these kinds of force relations from a governmentality perspective one can unravel the formation of these relations in a practice as the implementation of development projects. Li insists to look also at the reactions of the 'targeted population' while studying the programs. The work of Li and similarly minded scholars encouraged me strongly to go to the villages of Wadi Araba and to meet with people there. As I will elaborate more below, I did not succeed

in it as much as had hoped to. Not being able to go as deeply as I would have liked into Wadi Araba itself, I shifted my focus more towards the 'programs'. In the understanding of Foucault's description of power, the focus on programs does not imply an erasing or denial of the space of contestation and reaction. I would argue that the study of governmentality always asks for the incorporation of the diverse assemblages of power relations or networks.

The analytic of governmentality asks 'how different locales are constituted as authoritative and powerful, how different agents are assembled with specific powers, and how different domains are constituted as governable and administrable.(Dean 1999 in Li, 2007:276)

The aim of governmentality is to look beyond the idea that government belongs to a central state and is enforced in one top-down direction. 'Other actors' are mostly translated as international donors, (trans) national companies or NGOs who are taken their place in domains that were previously designated to the state. Foucault states clearly that 'powers comes from below; that is there is no binary and all-encompassing opposition between rulers and ruled at the root of power relations, and serving as a general matrix – no such duality extending from the top down and reacting on more and more limited groups to the very depths of the social body' (Foucault 1976 in Szeman & Kaposy, 2011:134). In the end my dissertation starts from 'programs' that in themselves are part of power networks, and it would have been impossible to understand how the power relations relate and constitute each other without considering Wadi Araba and the local population as active actors that are part of the power constellation. To have a look into the witches brew, I had to make the journey from Ghent to Jordan.

## **2.4. Fields of gold**

Methodology is definitely not reducible to fieldwork, but if (as my supervisor sometimes reminds of us) the theory is in the case, then so too is the method.

Fieldwork has been crucial to this project in at least two respects. First, some of the existing literature on Jordan with regard to its development policies and history has been very thoroughly in facts and very descriptive mainly on the mandate period and the early decades after independents or post-1989 (e.g. Rogan & Tell 1994, Knowles 2005) Literature that explains the formation of Jordan as a state tends to apply a rather teleological approach whereby the passed decades are analysed as following distinct events (e.g. Curtis 2002, Robins 2004, Satloff 1994). Without doubt this literature has been fundamental in my

research to gain knowledge on historical facts and occurrences. However, I experienced this literature on the historical process in Jordan as too fragmented. The literature on Jordan that inspired me more was based on case-focused research in Jordan but connected to the broader (theoretical) frameworks and (genealogical) processes of Jordan (e.g. Bocco & Chatelard 2009; Chatelard 2003, 2005, Massad 2001; Parker 2009; Van Aken 1999, 2003, 2005, 2007). For my research project I aimed to illustrate a bigger process (i.e. the political power of the culturalisation of state formation and development) through related case studies. Even if a case dealt with historical events, I wanted to analyse how those events affect Jordan and Wadi Araba today. The second reason and probably the most common reason for fieldwork; through following projects and to go into encounters with involved people, I wanted to try to avoid writing too much from the books and more from what I was taught in 'the field'. This attempt brought many practical and ethical issues, which will be addressed below.

The step after making the choice for fieldwork is to define the field. I explained briefly why I thought it would be essential to go to Jordan and to do fieldwork. I can also explain why Wadi Araba is meaningful as a site for fieldwork, but I never explicitly questioned why I choose Wadi Araba. Conducting fieldwork was a good exercise to turn the cultural critique I tried to formulate into in a critique on my research as part of my home society.

#### *2.4.1 Choice of field*

During the past four years I have argued that the choice of Wadi Araba as a research site was to a certain extent by 'coincidence'. The initial idea was to look into the politics of development in the Jordan Valley with possible extension for comparison with the Southern Ghors and Wadi Araba. Mainly after the news on the proposed water conduit from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea, the southern part of the Jordan Rift Valley came more into the picture. One of the first informants, who introduced me more to the mega-project, brought me to Wadi Araba. He had a long history with the people there through his previous work. He became 'the fixer' who has been indispensable for my further introduction in the area and pointed my attention at other issues that were creating tension in Wadi Araba. Those points of friction have become the main cases of my dissertation. I realised early that the full covering of the entire Jordan Rift Valley would be practically impossible and after the encounter with Wadi Araba I decided to downscale my focus on Wadi Araba as research field for the next four years.

I (personally) consider fieldwork, no matter how extended and deeply one chooses to go into it, as the most interesting way of collecting data as it also delivers 'the most value' data. Due to my master thesis on the slums of Casablanca whereby I never conducted fieldwork and regretted it, it was almost obvious that with my doctoral thesis fieldwork would be included. Especially in the discipline of anthropology fieldwork is a key element in its methodology. But also in other disciplines it has taken a common place in a researcher's methodology. Fellow researchers I met in Jordan where neither always anthropologists but conducted nevertheless intensive fieldwork during several months. These encounters convinced me that empirical research through fieldwork on issues related to 'classic' political science topics as state formation can contribute to a broadening of the discipline's methods and research subjects. Besides being in favour of fieldwork as a methodological tool to bring together the many concerns that constituted my research, I want to illustrate that fieldwork within a political cultural critique can raise questions with regard to fieldwork as 'taken for granted'.

Gupta and Ferguson (1997) ask a surprising question: why has fieldwork never been questioned within anthropology? Many other issues as the notion of culture or ethnography as genre of writing have been questioned and strongly criticised (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997:2). My point here is not to criticise fieldwork as a methodological practice –above I embraced it as enriching for political sciences. But I do think it is important to think through what it implies to incorporate fieldwork in one's research. as 'obvious', like I did.

The whole discussion on being aware that your presence as researcher has consequences or that there is no such thing as being 'a fly on the wall' has been elaborated extensively. But there are two points raised by Gupta and Ferguson in their literature that are left out of the discussion about the relation between researcher and the field. The two issues relate to choice of field and the distinction between home and field. I mentioned before that my choice of Wadi Araba as my field has been a rather coincidental process due to the 'snow ball effect'. Gupta and Ferguson have an insightful answer to this 'coincidence' that counters this 'stumbling into the field' (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997:11). The explanation of stumbling or coincidence 'prevents - according to Gupta and Ferguson - any systematic inquiry into how those field sites became to be good places for doing fieldwork in the first instance' (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997:11). Looking back on my decision of Wadi Araba as a research field, it happened through an encounter with an area that has the features of a place in the margins of the state where everybody talked about as empty. The 'characteristics' of Wadi Araba and stories about the area were definitely triggers to focus on the area. Also the fact that little research has been conducted in Wadi Araba is an extra asset to add to a project description. In retrospect, the remark of Gupta and Ferguson is confrontational especially in relation to a

research whereby a main critique is the static, bounded and culturalistic approach of development initiatives. This relates to a second point of the aforementioned authors; the differentiation between home and field.

The very distinction between "field" and "home" leads directly to what we call a *hierarchy of purity* of field sites. After all, if "the field" is most appropriately a place that is "not home," then some places will necessarily be *more* "not home" than others, and hence more appropriate, more "fieldlike." All ethnographic research is thus done "in the field," but some "fields" are more equal than others - specifically, those that are understood to be distant, exotic, and strange. (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997b:13)

Despite the lessons learned with regard to relations between research and informants, the process of choosing a field and its position to a researcher's home base, might still carry an old (colonial if you will) attitude with it. At least for my own research I always made a clear distinction between what belonged to my field research and home<sup>11</sup>. I took it as an important aspect of my research and more 'workable' to keep this clear distinction, while this (problematic) distinction should be an essential part of the research as a critique on the 'home society' where one's academic work is produced and read.

#### *2.4.2 Relations in the field*

The choice of field also implies a choice of informants who are essential for a research to proceed. While being in Jordan I conducted interviews with all kinds of actors who had connection with my case studies. I would visit employees of different ministries (agricultural, municipal affairs, planning, tourism and heritage, water and irrigation etc.), decentralised governmental units like the Jordan Valley Authority or the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority, (Royal) Non-Governmental Organisations, researchers affiliated with Wadi Araba, local inhabitants of the villages of Wadi Araba and their municipality offices, researchers who work as consultant for projects as the water conveyor, planning offices etc. I tried to cover all the different scales that related to the described initiatives.<sup>12</sup> It goes without saying that some contacts were easier in reaching out towards me with information than others, and that these relations changed over time.

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<sup>11</sup> Home can also be interpreted as a mental construction and not physical per sé. During the months in Jordan, the rented apartments in Amman were at different moments home or part of the field.

<sup>12</sup> Due to practical reasons I limited the scales within Jordan. Some cases, as the Royal Society of the Conservation of Nature, can be followed far beyond the Jordanian borders. This would have been a very insightful challenge.

#### *2.4.2.1 Fluctuating IDs*

Interviews were mainly organised in Amman as most ministries, NGOs, researchers, planners are located there. In Amman or Aqaba the meetings could be done in English. Rarely did I record the conversations, which left me reliant on notes. Taping does not have to be an issue, but as Jordan is small you can sense that people are more reluctant to talk when the recorder is on. They will be open or even outspoken during interviews as long as it is not put black on white. Myself together with other research colleagues in Jordan experienced that when their words were shown on paper, it would make some go into denial or even feeling offended. One way to avoid missing too much information due to writing notes and asking questions at the same time, was to be accompanied with a fellow researcher who was interested in similar topics.

In Wadi Araba the interviews were always in Arabic. This implied that an interpreter always accompanied me. Because I was not able to talk directly to people, this had two significant impacts on my research. First it created a barrier between the interviewees and myself to build a certain relation of trust. Several times I would meet with the same informant, but since the inability to talk personally there always was a sphere of formality. Secondly, the atmosphere and the information that was exchanged depended on who joined me as interpreter. The most frequent women who joined me where; a young German or a German-Moroccan female colleague researcher and a senior female researcher as well as a local English-speaking woman. The fact that they are all female was not a conscious choice. These female interpreters joined mostly for rather structured interviews. Other visits to Wadi Araba were with representatives of the Jordan Valley Authority, Jordan River Foundation, Hashemite Fund for Development of Jordan Badia or the person who introduced me first to Wadi Araba. With each of them it has been a fascinating experience because all of them had a key to open one door or the other. On the other hand, depending who joined me, I received specific kinds of information. Also much depended, mainly with regard to the representatives of organisations or government, on how the current relation was between the interviewee and the institution that joined me. The status of that relation changed sometimes very fast. Unfortunately that reflected also upon me and influenced in its turn my relation to informants.

#### *The Janus-faced researcher?*

In Amman and Aqaba I was verbally stronger than in Wadi Araba. Obviously this also influenced the perception about who I was amongst informants. I look younger than I actually am, so in Amman I experienced several times that the interviewee(s) thought that they could



play me around. When I showed I had come prepared, it could move the conversation further or it would make them suspicious about who I really was. Maybe I was coming from the 'Other Side' (code name for Israel) to collect data on what is happening in Wadi Araba. Google apparently informs that my research is on 'Infrastructural violence in the West Bank'<sup>13</sup>, I was obviously asked for explanation and told that I smile like an angel, but I am not an angel of mind. At the same time, they would show me proudly around their implemented projects and would be open for many discussions. When I – as a young unmarried woman - was on my own in Wadi Araba I received guidance. I could not go anywhere without being accompanied. Although I was concerned how I could get access to information from men in Wadi Araba, it turned out to be rather a non-issue. As a European woman I was 'classified' as a third gender who has access to both female and male spaces. It was more being European that obstructed me from receiving information. During an interview when I was accompanied by the German-Moroccan colleague, the interviewee was talking to her in Arabic and telling her not to translate to me what he was explaining because as European I would not understand. It turned out that the topic of their conversation was fraud.

#### *2.4.2.2. Sympathy for the devil*

My visits to Wadi Araba were mainly single-day visits or multiple-days but with sleeping accommodation in Aqaba. I stayed once for several days with a single mother of five, but found myself too much of a burden. As mentioned above, I joined representatives of the Jordan Valley Authority on several occasions. The first time I was asked to join them for an explorative trip to see their projects in Wadi Araba, I was reluctant to accept the invitation. First, I was going to meet people of the villages accompanied with people who I tried not to be associated with. I wanted to make sure that this would not effect negatively on my contacts in Wadi Araba. Second, I was aware that my position towards development actors was more critical. So, how is it not hypocrite to join them on a rather informal field visit and formulating their information afterwards into a critique?

In one way it could be perceived as being biased; the Bedouin population as the romantic *noble savage* and development planners as the bad ones. On the other hand it might be more a hypercorrection to avoid colonial traps of paternalism that in the end results in an attempt for the salvation of the local people of Wadi Araba (in a way a very colonial attitude). I place this 'hypercorrection' in the perspective of Gupta and Ferguson. We learned to be aware of our position as researcher towards informants, but maybe this awareness can also

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<sup>13</sup> This is the research theme of the original project proposal, and is currently the research of a colleague.

turn into a hypercorrection that makes one blind for the approach to the field *an sich* (i.e. home – field distinction). The distinction carries as well a difference between Us and Them, exactly the position or attitude that is to be avoid in relations with informants.

#### *2.4.3 Expectations in a changing field*

I have established fieldwork relations in Jordan. Some ended more friendly than others. But they all formed a network that was the foundation for my research. Towards the end it became clear that some informants had (legitimate) expectations from me. These expectations came from local inhabitants as well as from government and organisation employees. All have had experiences with ‘outsiders’ coming in with questions or critiques (in relation to projects).

People in the villages of Wadi Araba have seen people come and go with questionnaires or surveys, but not much was ever realised in concrete terms. So it might not be surprising that I was first approached with scepticism, and later received the question if I could provide them with a needed well for water or anything that could change their situation. I spent quite some time with people from the Jordan Valley Authority or the Royal Society for Conservation of Nature, which resulted in a rather open exchange of information. From their side, there were questions regarding advice on how to implement and manage their projects. One informant within the RSCN told us that they have been told many times before how not to do their initiatives, but never how they should do it. An analytic answer was not an option, what was needed were straight forward suggestions and advices. With this person, also the fixer, we spent hours in the car and discussed many topics. When he asked us a question he would finish with ‘do not answer as a political scientist’. The (co-authored) chapter in this dissertation on the issue of nature conservation and local knowledge was given to this same person to give us feedback and to illustrate what we do with the information. Unfortunately our critique formulated in the paper was not received well and caused severe damage to the trust that was built during the years. Although it is a very unpleasant experience, David Mosse reminds us that as researcher, you and your outputs are not external to a research project.

Not only the author, but also the book itself is uncomfortably part of the world that it describes. It is not just a text (separate from action) but is performative. Indeed, it may be read less in terms of its ideas – for development managers the theoretical and comparative significance of my analysis was irrelevant – and more in terms of its capacity to disturb social relations linked to ruling representations; its potential to affect reputations

and materially to influence fund flows. (Mosse,2005: xii)

Also Foucault mentions in his work on methodology how he has been irritating people as social workers. He formulated the objections he received in what a critique is and what it is not.

Critique doesn't have to be a premise of a deduction which concludes: this then is what needs to be done. It should be an instrument for those who fight, those who resist and refuse what is. Its use should be in processes of conflict and confrontation, essays in refusal. It doesn't have to lay down the law for the law. It isn't a stage in a programming. It is a challenge directed to what is. (Foucault 1978 in Faubion, 2000:236)

#### *2.4.4 Knowledge production from a cultural critique; a small step for the decolonisation of science?*

What types of knowledge do you want to disqualify in the very instant of your demand: 'Is it science?' Which speaking, discoursing subjects – which subjects of experience and knowledge – do you then want to 'diminish' when you say: 'I who conduct this discourse am conducting a scientific discourse, and I am a scientist'? Which theoretical-political *avant-garde* do you want to enthrone in order to isolate it from all the discontinuous forms of knowledge that circulate about it? (Foucault, 1994:205 in Goldman, 2001:205)

I mentioned before that through the formulation of a cultural critique based on 'foreign' knowledge it offers space for a critique on a home society. Besides the awareness of how to approach informants and even the field as such, there still exists a great concern about how scholars produce knowledge about 'the Other'. For my own personal research, I question how the representation of the Other (i.e. Bedouin population in Jordan) is incorporated in the development of Jordan. It should be natural that I also question this questioning. Nevertheless, the focus should still be on producing knowledge.

Within literature on knowledge in relation to 'science', I always found the perspective of post-colonial studies intriguing and insightful if I place it together with cultural critique. Timothy Mitchell illustrates that your own choice of paradigm can bring a whole other perspective on the world or on your own working field in specific. In many of our case studies, the fields are subjected to uneven power relations.

Unlike an argument about cultural relativism, a postcolonial perspective locates these problems of colonialism, global expansion, and translation within the history and practices of science, rather than outside it as secondary issues that might be addressed after the science is already formed. (Mitchell T., 2002:7-8)

Walter Mignolo (2000a, 2000b) and Ramon Grosfoguel (2009), together with other post-colonial authors (e.g. Enrique Dussel, Anibal Quijano, Gloria Anzaldua) put 'strategies' forward for decolonising knowledge. The suggestions are quite straightforward and definitely questionable, but they offer some starting points. To mention a few: show your own epistemic location, be critical on Eurocentric and Third World fundamentalists, use different canons, encourage critical dialogues, take knowledge that is not your own serious, etc. (Grosfoguel, 2009:11) In sum these authors are working towards a future project that is 'a radical universal decolonial diversity project' (Grosfoguel, 2009:33). Besides the coercive tone, it is rightfully pointed out that we are still stuck within the same colonial power matrix that has led us to a 'global coloniality' (Grosfoguel, 2009:22). Such a global coloniality has been produced by colonial cultures and structures in the modern/capitalist system. Especially Mignolo is encouraging a different form of epistemology, namely border thinking.

Today, silenced and marginalized voices are bringing themselves into the conversation of cosmopolitan projects, rather than waiting to be included. Inclusion is always a reformative project. Bringing themselves into the conversation is a transformative project that takes the form of border thinking or border epistemology-- that is, the alternative to separatism is border thinking, the recognition and transformation of the hegemonic imaginary from the perspectives of people in subaltern positions. Border thinking then becomes a "tool" of the project of critical cosmopolitanism. (Mignolo, 2000b:736-737)

The post-colonial authors talk in 'radical' terms about new ways of knowledge production, but they do not aim to wipe out the colonial past and present. On the contrary, it can only be useful to work with the history of colonialism, its effects on the (colonial) present especially with its relation towards science and the reproduction of this coloniality through science. Therefore I relate the cultural critique to fieldwork as well. The cultural critique towards the state and development institutions in Jordan, can similarly be applied or used on the process of research. Both the institutions and researchers aim to produce knowledge and apply this knowledge (in certain cases). Not only the institutions should be aware of the 'roots' (genealogy if you will) of the premises where their knowledge is based on, the same goes for

researchers. The distinctions made between researchers and informants and between home and field are variables in the production of knowledge.

## **2.5 Conclusion**

My methodological chapter is the result of thinking about method after the practical research part. Actually it is rather a reflection of my thinking about how to do research during four years. Some parts of method were chosen consciously, other parts were improvisation while doing. Nevertheless, I experienced that the whole process becomes only observable afterwards. This resulted in a lot of questioning and ideas of how I could have done it differently. There should always be a will to improve. I know that I write more about my appreciation for post-colonial studies and its project for a different epistemology than I accomplished this is practice. Therefore the attempt to formulate a cultural critique has been an exercise for myself to understand how the critique I write could be applied on my own research and its methodology. I formulate the political cultural critique as a critical perspective towards the insights of culture and subject formation by actors of development or state formation, it is as important to be aware on how one's own research contributes towards the idea of culture and subject formation.

The issue of culture is as crucial in my methodology in relation to the practice of research, but as well in the final empirical study that this dissertation materialises. The main question of this research correspond to the point of what I mean with a political cultural critique; how has the use of the idea of culture been present and effective in the Jordanian state formation and in the interrelated politics of development for Jordan? The three main arguments that run through the next four chapters are as well translated within this methodology chapter but as critical points towards doing research. The first argument deals with the naturalisation of the notion of culture. I argue that in formation of the state of Jordan and in the realm of development this naturalisation has pushed forward the idea that there exist a civic and an a-civic way of living. Due to the naturalisation, there is also a process of de-politicising the idea of culture. This can especially be noticed in development discourses and practices. Through the case studies I illustrate that development is on the contrary an act of governmentality, hence an issue of politics that leans strongly on the idea of culture. Finally, this whole dissertation is also written to emphasise the importance of places in the margin like Wadi Araba for an understanding of broader processes of state formation and the politics of development. This last argument, I tried to fulfil by writing this dissertation, despite the great amount of existing literature concerned with development in the so-called rural areas of the world.

### III. On the issue of culture

During the last 510 years of the European/Euro-American capitalist/patriarchal modern/colonial world-system we progressed from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century “Christianize or we’ll shoot you” to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century “civilize or we’ll shoot you” to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century “develop or we’ll shoot you” to the late 20<sup>th</sup> Century “neoliberalize or we’ll shoot you” to the early 21<sup>st</sup> Century “democratize or we’ll shoot you”. (Grosfoguel, 2009: 28)

Walking through the streets of Jordan’s capital city Amman, you can get the feeling of always being watched. There are billboards of all sizes spread across the city showing King Abdullah II, often accompanied by a family member. Most striking perhaps is the variety of outfits worn by the King. As representative of the Jordanian people, each of his outfits refers to a particular segment of the population. The-King-as-unifier-of-all-people is what we could call one of many such attempts to create a political community (Robins, 2004: 1) that would recognise itself (and the wider state) as Jordanian. Jilian Schwedler refers in her work on the recent protests in Jordan to two other unifying initiatives, those of ‘Jordan First’ and ‘We are all Jordan’ (Schwedler, 2012: 261). Schwedler points at a fundamental aspect of these national projects, that they are especially attempts to ‘construct a particular kind of new Jordanian citizen’ (Schwedler, 2012: 261).

In the history of Jordan, the struggle towards ‘modernity’ and the creation of a ‘political community’ has been considered as necessary for its ultimate formation as a state. Within this process, the notion of culture, or rather the idea of culture, has had a very present but also somewhat ambiguous role. The Jordanian situation thus offers an opportunity to use the notion of culture not as a subject of research – into ‘the culture(s) of Jordan’ or ‘Bedouin culture’ – but rather as an analytical concept. By working with the concept of culture as an analytical tool, we can unravel *the political meaning of the culturalisation of state formation and related development discourse and practices*.<sup>14</sup> Although the general process centres on the construction of a unified Jordanian nation, the dominant discourse mainly concerns *difference*, that of (within) the inhabitants of the Jordanian territory. Following Arjun Appadurai (1996), I will approach this difference as expressed in primarily cultural essentialist terms.

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<sup>14</sup> Which is not argue that culture is the tool *par excellence* for analysis, since I would argue more for a broad approach that gives space to other equally useful concepts’ such as race, gender and class; rather, this employs a (re)introduction of the notion culture in the political sciences (below).

As stated, the Bedouin population has played a significant role in the Jordanian state formation, and Wadi Araba is mainly inhabited by a (now settled) Bedouin population. Although the inhabitants of Wadi Araba do not belong to the most influential Jordanian tribes, the region forms an interesting space within which to unravel the entanglement of the development apparatus and the way Jordan's economic-political system developed over time. Within this process, I will focus on the twinned course of *de-politicisation* and the *culturalisation of development*.

This focus involves an illustration of *the political use of the idea of culture* through different periods in the creation of Jordan and how development institutions have taken part in this process. Colonisation, nationalisation and neoliberalism as specifications of three periods in Jordan are treated of as three separate parts of the chapter, but are at the same time understood as a continuum. Through reviewing the literature on the creation of Jordan and especially the role of the Bedouin population in this process, emphasis is placed on *how culture was used* through these different phases of state formation, and not just in the institutionalisation of development. The *ambiguity* of the role of Jordan's Bedouin population in the ongoing (re-)creation of Jordan will also be a key element of the chapter.

The first section of this chapter commences with the Mandate period, although recognising the shortcomings this implies with regards to a fuller historical picture of Jordan – meaning, this chapter is not intended as a reflection of the general historical creation of Jordan. In fact, starting with the British mandate directly entails 'ignoring both the Ottoman experience and indeed the people of Jordan' (Robins, 2004: 4). My intention, however, is to identify a certain moment in time with which to reference a trend of enculturalisation in the formation of Jordan.

The first two sections start from a literature review on the progress of colonial and national events in Jordan. The third section on the enculturalisation of development is based on collected fieldwork material. This chapter thus represents an attempt to merge political science and anthropology.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Lisa Wedeen (2002) made an explicit attempt to bring anthropology and political science together by introducing a new understanding of "culture" with an anthropological approach for political analysis.

### 3.1 The colonial difference

A defining moment came with the British decision to separate the mandates of Palestine and of Transjordan; at last, the periphery was to become a centre in its own right. (Robins, 2004: 16)

Jordan, or more precisely Transjordan, emerged from the map, literally as well as metaphorically, as part of the British mandate for Palestine established by the Cairo conference in 1921 and officially by the League of Nations in 1922.<sup>16</sup> Transjordan had been administered as a separate entity within the united area of the Palestinian mandate state, but in 1923 it was designated as a single mandate territory. With Transjordan as an additional mandate area to be governed, a ruling system became necessary. Amir Abdullah, who arrived from Hijaz in Jordan in 1920, received recognition as head of Transjordan after a few years of jurisdiction over the new mandate (Robins, 2004: 36-37). With his appointment, the Hashemite lineage was secured for the throne of Transjordan. Before the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan could be realised, however, many challenges laid ahead for the newly appointed Amir and his colonial allies, in particular the need to establish control over the wilderness east of the Jordan River. As Michael Fischbach (2000) indicates, this colonial rule was not the first encounter with a form of governance for the peoples of Transjordan. Nevertheless, the inhabitants of the territory, ranging from settled farmers to nomadic Bedouin, had to be placed under the colonial apparatus.<sup>17</sup>

An important challenge was that of how to create and manage a political community that would relate to the future state of Jordan and recognise the sovereignty of colonial or national rule? Certain issues during the early inception of Transjordan – the constant threat of tribal raids from Saudi-Wahhabi raiders,<sup>18</sup> mainly from the east and south borders, and the armed Bedouin tribes within the territory – led the British to take decisions that could simultaneously serve a variety of purposes. The Arab Legion, founded in 1923 from existing police and military forces brought together by Amir Abdullah and British commander Frederick G. Peake, lost much of its competence during the ensuing years and was not able

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<sup>16</sup> Already in 1915, it was agreed that Britain would gain control of Transjordan in the then secret agreement referred to as the Sykes-Picot treaty that awarded to Britain and France the duty of recognition and protectorship of the 'independent Arab State or a Confederation of Arab States, as the soon-to-be ex-Ottoman Arab lands were referred to in the opening clause.

<http://www.britishonlinearchives.co.uk/9781851171507.php>

<sup>17</sup> Nomadic Bedouins constituted almost half (46 percent) of the Transjordanian population in 1922, numbering 102,120 people out of a total of 225,350, according to the estimates of the Tribal Administration Department (Niyabat al-'Asha'ir). (Massad, 2001: 56)

<sup>18</sup> See Bocco & Tell (1994)



to deal with the armed Bedouins. Thus, what proved to be a very effective measure was introduced: John Bagot Glubb, or Glubb Pasha, well known for his experience with (pacifying) Iraqi Bedouins, was called to Transjordan. When he arrived in 1930, he installed the Desert Patrol as part of the Arab Legion (Massad, 2001: 105). Its original task was the defence of the Saudi border, but the integration into the army of the Bedouin population co-opted them into the colonial system for the control both of their own population and the general Bedouin population of the Mandatory-Hashemite state. Joseph Massad detailed the figure of Glubb Pasha as the embodiment of (British) colonialism in Jordan.<sup>19</sup>

Of course the British generally were not as keen on the Bedouin population as was Glubb, but his decennia-long quest to normalise this segment of the Transjordanian population engendered an image of the colonial 'other' that was required to become the genuine Transjordanian man: 'In that, Glubb's project entailed molding the Bedouin's body and mind into something new... His body was to become the national body' (Massad, 2001: 117- 118). While Glubb's colonial colleagues preferred to emphasise the a-modernity of the Bedouin population, Glubb himself gave great importance to the cultural difference.

The approach to dealing with this distinct segment of the population was extremely gendered and characterised by racialisation. Above all, the Bedouin were conceived as radically different from settled men and women. It was not that Glubb 'created' a Bedouin culture; rather, he selected certain characteristics and promoted these as *the* typical Bedouin features, their distinguishing qualities. The chosen traits included such aspects as loyalty, attire and knowledge, those, in fact, that suited a military identity, as part of the army. The Bedouin could be sent out into the desert to create peace there and among themselves. This cultural difference helped Jordan to obtain and maintain control over newly gained territory in its first decades, but in later years would become a means to differentiate Jordan as a national entity and the people inside its established boundaries.

Obviously, the creation of the special Bedouin army force does not represent the entire history of the Mandatory-Hashemite state, but it reflects the integration of 'cultural difference' into political processes, in the creation of a colonial or national state. Arjun Appadurai (1996) would call this process 'culturalism', which he defines very clearly and insightfully as 'the conscious mobilization of cultural difference in the service of a larger national or transnational politics' (Appadurai, 1996:15). Appadurai works with the notion of culturalism in the context of

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<sup>19</sup> Interestingly, Glubb was himself unaware of the way that he embodied the colonial system that he actually despised. His obsession with keeping the Bedouins in their 'purest' state made him ignorant of the fact that through his peculiar relationship with his beloved Bedouin, a relationship developed that gave him power over them, and thus facilitated the rule of colonial law (Massad, 2001: 15).

group mobilisation by a conscious identity politics. Such culturalist movements work very consciously with identity and culture with the aim of opposing state or other culturalist movements (Appadurai, 2005: 15). This can be related to the way the Bedouin population was appropriated by the British mandatory apparatus, based on specific characteristics, with the aim of mobilising them to serve the Mandatory-Hashemite state against potential outside threats. As Massad observes, the incorporation of the Bedouin moulded them as symbolic entities that would both represent and protect the new state.

Schwedler's examples of initiatives such as 'We are all Jordan' are very concrete and current illustrations of the creation of the idealised citizen. In such initiatives, there is a strong emphasis on erasing difference among the populace and a demand for it to take an active, individual responsibility in fashioning a united Jordan. During the mandate period, however; it was rather the (selective) difference of the Bedouin population that was underlined. At the same time though, while the difference was placed as central, the Bedouins were incorporated in a colonial system that required their material adaptation and integration (or, more strongly, assimilation). And ultimately, regardless of whether the difference between populations is emphasised or denied, at the level of discourse and eventually in practice it has the same function of establishing an idea or representation of the state and its citizens. In actual fact, the level of differentiation of the population has fluctuated through time (below).

Within the theoretical literature this differentiation has been conceptually translated in a variety of ways. Pertinently, one is to be found in Edward Said's notion of Orientalism, with its analysis of the use of 'othering' as a way to divide (between the Occident and the Orient) and the deployment of this division to legitimate (colonial) rule. The culturalism that Appadurai describes I perceive as inherent to Orientalism generally and to the colonial rule of the British mandate in particular:

Orientalism is absolutely anatomical and enumerative: to use its vocabulary is to engage in the particularizing and dividing of things Oriental into manageable parts.  
(Said, 1978: 72)

Although Said sometimes questioned Foucault's methods, his remark is very Foucauldian.<sup>20</sup> The process of integrating the Bedouin population into the Mandated state may be seen an

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<sup>20</sup> See e.g. Said (1972) for a critique, but against that, Said (1978: 23).

example of a governmentality technology of biopolitics.<sup>21</sup> 'Biopolitics' is here understood in terms of technologies that aim to 'normalise' populations. The integration of the Bedouin population into the army, for example, had a significant impact on their nomadic way of living. Nomadism had to be abandoned for the Bedouin population to become proper citizens. Within the proposals to settle nomads there is a clear discourse pronouncing the difference between nomads (the primitive, implicitly tribal) and modern man (the civilised, implicitly national). The notion of biopolitics in Foucault's work refers to the emergence of a specific (political) knowledge and of new disciplines, such as statistics, demography and epidemiology. These forms of discipline make it possible to analyse processes of life at the level of populations and to 'govern' individuals and collectives by practices of correction, exclusion, normalisation, disciplining, therapeutics and optimisation (Lemke, 2010: 431). By deciphering nomadism as Bedouins in statistics on literacy, demography, health and suchlike the 'othering' is clarified, given substance and thus enabled as object to be applied in governance.

In the progress of the formation of the state of Jordan, even until today, the main rationale of enumerating was to enhance the improvement of the population inhabiting the state territory. Classical ways of implementing the rationale of improvement comprise involvement in housing, medical care and schooling. Although its aim is improvement, the question also to be posed is that of whom the improvement will benefit. In the end, Transjordan was a colonial project, whereby parts of the *badia* were perceived as the embodiment of 'otherness'. As Timothy Mitchell states, the non-West must play the role of the outside, the otherness that creates the boundary of the space of modernity' (Mitchell T., 2000: 16). The control gained over the *badia* was a victory over the other through its incorporation and made the *badia* part of the new modern state of Jordan.

After a long journey towards independence, in May 1946, the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan was declared independent, with Amir Abdullah as its monarch. Nevertheless' although Jordan was ostensibly freed of its colonial administration in 1946, the colonial difference remains. This is entirely logical if we look at how Partha Chatterjee (1993) introduced the notion of colonial difference:

[T]he representation of the 'other' as inferior and radically different, and hence incorrigibly inferior, is not only in relation between countries or nations but also

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<sup>21</sup> Biopolitics, biopower and governmentality have had a life of their own since being introduced by Foucault; the first two of which he never fully deployed but have definitely found their way since into multi-disciplinary studies.

within populations that the modern institutions of power presume to have normalized into a body of citizens endowed with equal and non-arbitrary rights (Chatterjee, 1999:33).

A colonial power such as the British Empire neither entered places that were unwritten pages, nor left without trace, although the British might sometimes have perceived this otherwise. Jordan, carrying the epithet of the backyard of Palestine or Syria, was mainly albeit definitely not exclusively inhabited by a nomadic population that would serve as a good object for colonial integration. Jordan was, in the words of Homi Bhabha (1994: 246), the *terra incognita* or the *terra nulla*<sup>22</sup> that provided a human resource to safeguard the newly defined borders and population.

The notions of 'culturalism', 'orientalism', 'biopolitics' and 'colonial difference' offer many (perhaps too many) ways to help us understand certain characteristics of government, in this case colonialism but including its later forms. Nevertheless, they all point at the power of the idea of culture that is predominantly articulated in terms of difference. This basis of governance is not only to be conceived of as directed towards the past, to the initial colonial establishment of nation and state, but is also of undeniable importance for the analysis of other historical and present-day dynamics in Jordan. The further development of Jordan as an independent state is still needed to protect its borders and population. In its early days, under King Abdullah, Jordan had a difficult time differentiating itself from the former British mandate and finding distinctive positions oriented towards neighbouring countries (Al Mahadin 2007). Indeed, the struggles Jordan had to overcome in its transition towards independence and beyond imply a notion of post-colonial material realities, I would argue, that is to be understood as a continuation of colonialism after decolonisation, and not as a break in time. Massad perceives colonialism similarly as a continuous process:

After the end of formal colonialism, national identities and cultures in the postcolonies are not only modes of resistance to colonial power, they are also the proof of colonialism's perpetual victory over the colonized. The irony of this is in having us believe that this colonial subjection and subjectivation is anticolonial agency. (Massad, 2001: 278)

From the literature, it becomes clear that the first attempts of Abdullah I to find his and Jordan's place in the region were very much rooted in the Mandate period. The British powers were still beside him after 1946 and the idea of a united Palestine-Jordan territory

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<sup>22</sup> See Homi Bhabha, *The location of culture*, (Bhabha, 1994:246)

continued to be on the table.<sup>23</sup> Obviously the latter objective became particularly sensitive following the occurrence of the Nakba in 1947-48 and subsequent political rearrangements of neighbouring countries *vis à vis* the new state of Israel and its alliance, leading to an atmosphere that was only to become more tense after deadly attacks by extremist Jewish groups against Palestinian villagers. The ambiguous relationship of Abdullah with the Jewish Agency did not create the most comfortable position for him at that time. Despite the heavy losses of the 1948-49 war and subsequent displacement of Palestinians to neighbouring countries, for King Abdullah I the war ended with the fulfilment of his dream: the unification of the west and east banks of the River Jordan.

### **3.2 The Bedouin as national symbol and the significant other**

The unification of the banks (and the later disengagement from the West Bank) engendered a lasting discourse on 'Who is Jordanian?' within which the different segments of the population have been accorded different and shifting positions. The disputed integration of the West Bank in 1950 into Jordanian territory also implied a need for the integration of the Palestinian population. The population tripled after the inclusion, with Palestinians living before 1948 in Central Palestine, the previous reference for the West Bank, and displaced Palestinians who moved to the East Bank between 1948 and 1952, who were assigned Jordanian nationality.

The annexation and assignment of nationality occurred when Abdullah I was still ruling. After his assassination in 1951 and a year of rule by his son Talal, Hussein – Talal's oldest son – ascended the throne. Hussein inherited a newborn nation that had not yet found its internal balance or outwards position. There were many challenges for the newly established (and extended) kingdom, both internal and external. These challenges led King Hussein to move towards a phase of pluralist politics, within which different population groups were accorded more or less prominence depending on the nature of the emerging threat. King Hussein ruled for almost five decades and had to redirect his position continuously in the face of many 'potential threatening situations'. With a foiled coup d'état in 1957 (the first of several attempts), spearheaded from inside the palace, Hussein took severe measures introducing martial law to 'bring to an end the turbulent experience of pluralist politics in the kingdom'

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<sup>23</sup> Abdullah was aiming more precisely for an Arab Palestinian territory. This is all to be understood in the context of the contemporaneous process of Zionism, leading to the partition of historical Palestine into Israeli (Jewish) and Arab (Jordanian, Palestinian) regions. Abdullah's aspiration was for the unification of the west (part of the Arab regions) and east banks of the Jordan River.

(Robins, 2004: 101).<sup>24</sup> Although normal political practices were put on hold, there was still a political apparatus acting upon the formation of the new country.

The rise of nationalism in Jordan during this period presents an example of a process both guiding and guided national and regional forces and events. Like other nascent, post-colonial states in the Middle East – and Asia and Africa too, for that matter (Massad, 2001: 165) – Jordan had to negotiate different forms of nationalism that were active in its territory, notably including one strand that was more cultural, negatively oriented as anti-colonial and anti-Western, and another that was more ethnically based, on the negative definer of an exclusiveness towards Palestinians, and which favoured relations with Western allies. These inherently competing forms developed even as Arab nationalism was flourishing and contested in neighbouring countries, mainly Egypt and Syria. After the '57 coup and subsequently, the implementation of the martial law, the anti-Western form of nationalism was side-lined. The nationalism that Abdullah had supported – a politically oriented nationalism supporting connections to the old colonial powers – was reinstalled in the palace. Within this context, the United States were embraced as an ally of the Jordanian monarchy.

Hussein's main goal at that time was to create a feeling of harmony among his diverse populations. As Massad points out (2001: 200), Hussein tried to introduce a balanced representation of different population segments among the positions of power in the military and government. A strategy of group co-optation and playing off opposing individuals was implemented to put down any possible threat. Regardless of how hard Hussein tried to keep his entourage under strict surveillance, however, he could not prevent (street) protests, particularly after Israeli insurgencies in border villages.

### *3.2.1 The new significant other*

By creating an imaginary but significant 'other', an identity is created, specified in contradistinction, by what the other is not.<sup>25</sup> Said (1978: 2) illustrates this othering by illustrating how European colonialism created an Orient that was necessary to position the European powers as the superior in respect of the Orient, to help define Europe (or the West).<sup>26</sup> Under King Hussein, the Bedouin and Palestinian populations were simultaneously

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<sup>24</sup> Under martial law, a temporary military government was established until November 1958. Martial law was again introduced in 1967, following the Arab/Israeli war (Brynen, 1992: 77).

<sup>25</sup> My appreciation to Kris Rutten for pointing out that this is actually the case for any form of nationalism; with reference to Benedict Anderson (1983) and Michael Billig (1995)

<sup>26</sup> This creation had material implications but was also accompanied with a powerful discourse. For the Occident, the Orient is a part of itself, but one (that) which had stagnated and remained fixed in another time. The Bedouin population is regularly represented as the Oriental.

deployed as both the 'glue' and yet also the other of society. As the 'original' inhabitants of the land, the Bedouin were (presented/regarded) as its 'natural' inheritors and represented as the nation with which the young and still fragile state was (to be) identified. At the same time, however, the nomadic lifestyle, history of banditry and allegiance to tribe cast them in the role of threatening outsiders.

Attempts to keep the balance in Jordanian society came to a peak after the loss of the 1967 war and then the civil war of 1970.<sup>27</sup> Although the civil war reawakened the sense of internal threat (i.e. from Palestinians) and brought distrust and division (as well as death and militarisation), it also reinforced Jordanian national identity (Massad, 2001: 208).<sup>28</sup> Through this process, the Bedouins were once again represented as the true and loyal Jordanians and soldiers. The concept of 'the Jordanian Bedouin' had been manufactured during the Mandate, but it remained accessible for the purposes of stability in times of need and still sufficiently malleable for adaption to changing circumstances. Notably also, Massad (2001: 207) shows that at a certain point in the civil war, the distinction between Palestinian and Bedouin soldiers became gendered: Palestinian soldiers were 'womanised', meaning, portrayed as the weaker sex.

After the civil war, nationalism grew more influential in the formation of Jordanian identity. The exceptional status of the Bedouin population as representative of *the* Jordanian tradition gradually weakened. In the post-civil war context, two factors in particular pushed this weakening. On the one hand, the tribal law was abolished in 1976, an abolition that brought the Bedouins into the social order as 'non-alien' citizens. On the other hand, the Palestinian presence on the East Bank gained the status as primary national security danger, requiring a stronger national or 'indigenous' counterweight. The decision to disengage from the West Bank in 1988 caused Palestinian Jordanians who living there to lose their Jordanian nationality or else receive a two-year Jordanian passport (Massad, 2001: 262). While Jordan's rulers had lost political capital among Arabs for its war with the PLO following upon its Western orientation, an especially important trigger in reinforcing a nationalist discourse and policies was the Zionist insinuation that 'Jordan is Palestine'.

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<sup>27</sup> 'Black September', fought between Palestinians – who, with refugees, by then outnumbered the 'native' population by 2:1 – led by the PLO under Arafat against the (Trans-)Jordanians under Hussein. Final 'victory' was for the Hashemite lineage.

<sup>28</sup> The rhetoric of 'One Jordan' was – as it still is, in many ways – that of an imagined unity, as much persuasive ideology as descriptive dogma; also among 'indigenous' Jordanians, there was a tension between Jordanian nationalists and pan-Jordanians (although both segments had a rather exclusive vision towards Palestinians, and even for the pan-Jordanians, in favour of a unification of the two banks, Amman was to remain the centre of power (Robin, 2004: 135).

In the effort to create a united (in both demographic and geographic terms) Jordanian nation-state out of the Ottoman and British colonial heritage, the ruling monarch and his political entourage ruled according to difference, that is, by creating a necessary other. The Bedouin population was first targeted to fill this role. This served, as illustrated, both the process of settlement/pacification and as an imagined reflection of a Jordanian tradition. As a second significant other, the Palestinian represented on the one hand the unification of the two banks and the possibility to live as one nation, and on the other hand became labelled as a potential threat to the harmony (and original identity) of the nation. Many more different population groups inhabit the territory of what is today Jordan, including immigrant populations ranging from the descendants of Russian/Ottoman incomers escaping oppression and persecution and more recent economic migrants, such as semi-skilled workers from Egypt and southern Asian countries. All contributed to and are called upon for the creation of contemporary Jordan, but it is predominantly the Bedouin and Palestinian groups that are represented in history as threats to a nation built upon still recent colonial and very much imagined foundations.

### *3.2.2 Modalities of culturalisation*

As originally formulated by Foucault, governmentality, as a form of power exercised over populations, assumes the frame of the nation-state (Ferguson & Gupta, 2002: 996). Governmentality as a Foucauldian notion opens up an instructive perspective on the genealogy of Jordan. Although the two kings, Abdullah and Hussein, were of pivotal importance in the formation of Jordan, they were not the single modalities of power. Many other modalities have contributed to the continuous change of Jordan over time. These different forms of power have existed inside and outside Jordan; the colonial legacy and the long-lasting post-colonial relations with the British and later, especially, relations with international financial institutions are very concrete forms of power to which the head of the nation has many times had to bow.

Both Abdullah and Hussein tried to fulfil their vision of how the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan should look. As noted, this process has involved practices of othering and biopolitics, especially in the formation of the Bedouin soldiers and the strategy to divide population into Jordanians and non-Jordanians, while the ambiguous relationship between Jordan and historical Palestine and Palestine's displaced inhabitants within Jordan further marked the Jordanian process of state formation. As time progressed towards the late 1980s, a different governmental tool incorporating the idea of culture became installed, referred to by Anna Tsing (2000) as graduated sovereignty.



Tsing used this concept to analyse the relation between states and global markets. Her focus is on how states respond by activating or deactivating their different population segments according to the states' possible connections to global markets. In the case of Jordan, it became very clear after 1989 how Jordan tried or was forced to connect to global markets and corresponding powers. The several agreements with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) set the stage for a more business attractive environment (below), with economic and political reforms (i.e., in essence, reducing the state). After the IMF agreements (from 1989 until 2002), Jordan also entered into a Free Trade Agreement (2000) with the United States, became a member of the World Trade Organization (2000), created Qualified Industrial Zones, and engaged with other neoliberal oriented programmes and policies (bint Talal, 2004: 81).

These arrangements were intended to pull Jordan upwards on the economic ladder that in international terms converts also into geo-political power. Although the loans and agreements are centred on a generalised progress or development, a critique of this approach would argue that generally the main benefactors are few: trickle down is just that, a trickle. Nevertheless, the state sanctioned message of and for the national ideal is clear enough: a good citizen is an entrepreneurial citizen. From this perspective, inclusion or exclusion depends on what one contributes to Jordan's economic progress, regardless of, for example, ethnicity – so, pertinently here, no matter if citizens are Palestinian or Jordanian. In the preceding decades, by contrast, certain segments of society (i.e. the Bedouins and Palestinians) with the potential to connect to a broader economy had been deployed as secondary citizens (the Bedouin population in a more ambiguous way, to set and manage the boundaries of the new state of Jordan). Despite the partial erasure of difference between the various identities of Jordanian citizenry and the focus on what people can contribute personally to the development of the country (cf. 'We are all Jordan'), any 'incapacity' to contribute especially in economic terms may be translated in cultural (ethnic) terms.

In the last part of this chapter, I elaborate on this culturalisation of development in the present era of neoliberalism, when the ambiguous position of the Bedouins becomes once more visible. On the one hand, the Bedouins are (depicted as) the last of the inhabitants of modern Jordan to be connected to the global market, while on the other, they are the last carriers of the authentic Jordanian tradition. In a peculiar way, one position does not exclude the other in neoliberal strategies.

### **3.3 Culturalisation of development**

The development of Jordan as an independent state has been an uneven one, undoubtedly influenced by a range of regional dynamics, including the emergence of strong national movements and advent of wars (civil, Arab-Israeli and the Gulf) – as well as, more recently the Arab Spring and Syrian conflict. While the various nationalisms have affected Jordanian political dynamics, as outlined (above), the wars have resulted in successive influxes of refugees, along with the return of émigrés, leading to a host of economic and social pressures, together with, of course, attendant political repercussions. During the 1970s, the booming years of the oil business in the region that had been so crucial in defining external state and private interest and influence, started to slow down. Just as Jordan had benefited from the regional prosperity, so also was the country hit by the economic slowdown. Finally, Jordan agreed with the IMF to commence an SAP.

The 1989-93 SAP I aimed at ‘correcting the main structural imbalances in both the balance of payments and general budget while maintaining a reasonable growth’ (bint Talal, 2004: 71). For the first time, poverty assessments were conducted in the country and development funds installed. Around the same time, the restrictions on political liberties that had been in force since the mid-1950s were eased. It was, no doubt, hoped that budget management would bring Jordan back on the track of internal fiscal stability and economic prosperity. Unfortunately this did not occur. The Gulf war interrupted the process and the rigid focus on cutting, privatisation and competition (bint Talal, 2004: 81). Economic development stagnated and went even into reverse. Reactions by the people occurred in the form of riots due to cuts in wheat, oil and fodder subsidies (Pfeifer, 1999: 26; Lucas, 2003: 139). Thus, ascending to the throne in 1999, King Abdullah II determined to extend Hussein’s steps to liberalise Jordan, and it is in this context that attention is focused specifically on the Bedouins from the southern area Wadi Araba.

The southern portion of Wadi Araba is a very particular Bedouin area, and it would be misleading to present it and people as representative for other Bedouin areas. It is undoubtedly, a fascinating setting in which to observe the interaction of the historical role(s) of the Bedouins in the creation of Jordan within the context of the current neoliberal push for socio-economic development. Most interesting here is that the interaction has resulted in a double discourse on ‘the Bedouin case’. What to do with a people that is *still* living remote from ‘modernity’ but also embodies the national (living) heritage? This general tenor observed among (development) actors concerned with Wadi Araba is not unique to this case.

After periods of colonisation and imperialism and the urge to civilise and then modernise the rest of the world, there seems to be an increasing need from the West now to conserve what

is referred to by words such as 'local', indigenous', 'tradition' and 'culture'. This creates an almost schizophrenic situation: everybody should be as modern as 'us', but it would also be a pity to lose the exotic features and abundant variety of the world. It reminds one of the creation of zoos or world exhibitions (Mitchell T., 1991), but now the spectators travel to view on location, in the authentic environmental setting rather than bring the samples and specimens to the (colonial) homeland. And certainly also, it recalls the nineteenth century origins of anthropology, impelled by the (perceived) necessity of cataloguing the types of Man before the natives were extinguished (and when, indeed, 'primitives' were brought back for viewing at world fairs and anthropological society meetings).

In a popular Belgian magazine published in 2012 one could read an interview with an ethnographer who travelled the world to capture the world's last traditions on film in a project entitled *Before They Pass Away*.

*Before They Pass Away* is a tribute to what almost doesn't exist anymore. Not the people... they are still there. But their traditional way of living is disappearing visibly. Eighty percent of the people I visited have a cell phone. The world is moving, those peoples move along. In that transition everybody wants to become like us. They don't realise that their traditional appearance is unique and exceptional. (DM Magazine, 2012: 36)<sup>29</sup>

This whole magazine article is repeating what Mamdani (2005) would call 'culture talk'.<sup>30</sup> It places 'us' outside of culture and beyond tradition, implying that 'we' are somehow no longer traditional or cultural. Robbins (2001) similarly illustrates the current interest of international donors 'in the cultural survival of vanishing cultures and languages' (quoted by Sylvain, 2005: 362). This illustrates, as Mallki points out, 'wildlife' and the indigenous as an object of inquiry and imagination, in which that of the anthropologist is but an expression of a more generalised cultural relationship, expressed for the naturalist, the environmentalist, and the tourist (Mallki, 1997: 59) – a list that also includes, of course, the development agency.

Returning to the case at hand, we recall that in the creation of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, the Bedouin population has served variously as a protection force against cross-border invasions (by Glubb), as a mirror of the traditional Jordanian (in respect to modernising nationalism) and as the last 'backward' population (in respect to the recent

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<sup>29</sup> Author's translation.

<sup>30</sup> The core assumption [of cultural talk] is that we can read some people's politics – the politics of those who are not "modern" – from their culture, for culture is not something that they make; rather, it is their culture that makes them (Mamdani, 2005: 96).

move to neoliberalism). The representation of the Bedouin population has moved between 'wild man' and 'noble savage'. Besides their discursive deployment as definitional symbols, the Bedouins are also today pushed further towards a mainstream way of living by concrete measures. The following sections will illustrate this with and for Wadi Araba, where mainly small but also larger scale socio-economic and infrastructural initiatives have been and are being implemented to enhance this socio-economic 'progress'. Without condemning the projects, the main argument presented is that these initiatives are always situated in a specific landscape – here, that of Wadi Araba – and are never purely technical interventions. The idea of culture is strongly merged within the discourse and practices of development for socio-economic purposes that are inevitably framed in the political and, as such, in and by the governance of targeted development areas.

### *3.3.1 More bang for the buck*

The development projects related to Wadi Araba are designed to bring progress into the target area, which is described predominantly in terms of 'lack'. Unsurprisingly, the projects have not always been perceived as successes in remedying this lack. Often the slow progress of a project to alleviate the situation is charged on 'the Bedouin culture'. Simply, the backward culture is not sufficiently amenable to modernisation, at least not at the single project level of input (a much more profound and extended intervention is necessary if these people are going to be able to be helped to help themselves). The association between culture and progress is not unique to development planners' of course, and nor is it new; indeed, this linkage also goes back to early colonial times. And although one could argue that this theme is as such is somewhat outdated, not to say obsolete, I would contend to the contrary that this theme is still present, and that it still needs to be addressed.

Samuel Huntington is probably the best-known political scientist concerned to relate (political) progress and culture. For Lisa Wedeen, Huntington embodied a division of the political sciences that uses culture as an analytical concept to underpin the cause of 'differences in political and economic development' (Huntington, 1993, quoted in Wedeen, 2002: 715). Huntington has been very outspoken in his perception of the role of culture in the formation of the different civilisations and their stages of development, but one can also find more subtle literature with the same rationale. An article entitled '*Cultural Context: Explaining the Productivity of Capitalism*' (Mathers & Williamson, 2011) is an example. Starting from the premise that economic institutions, such as private property, rule of law and contract enforcement are critical for economic growth and development, and focusing on incorporating the role of culture into an understanding of the success and failure of economic

institutions, the argument is made that 'there are certain cultural attributes that either encourage or discourage institutions associated with economic freedom', and that 'the success or failure of formal economic institutions depends on the preexisting informal rules, or culture' (Mathers & Williamson, 2011:232).

The more interesting part of this article addresses the way in which economic freedom and culture are quantified. Specifically, the categories derived from the Economic Freedom of the World Index and the European and World Values Surveys comprise size of government, legal structure and security of private property rights, freedom to trade with foreigners, regulation of credit, labour and business and access to sound money; culture is downsized to trust, respect, individual self-determination and obedience (Mathers & Williamson, 2011: 235). These components, the authors argue, create the legitimacy for capitalism: 'Capitalism may be more productive in countries with cultures more compatible with capitalistic values, meaning that we get "more bang for the buck" (Mathers & Williamson, 2011: 247).

A similar argument is employed as a rationale for development interventions. One could expect that it is almost obvious that the different contexts in which people live –culture', we may say – have an influence on how certain forms of economics' like capitalism and neoliberalism, evolve. The push for economic development in Jordan, especially after the SAPs agreed with the IMF, represents a further extension of the neoliberal path.<sup>31</sup> The capitalist model generally is not only a macro-economic framework, but also an approach wherein personal development or success becomes a personal matter and within which the development imperative affords little space for the communal (the localised specifics of political history or social context).<sup>32</sup> Thus, the neoliberal model to which King Abdullah II currently aspires affects the inhabitants of Wadi Araba; they 'meet' neoliberalism mainly in the shape of projects that encourage entrepreneurship preceded by programmes that stimulate 'mentality change'.

### *3.3.2 The participating Bedouin*

Worldwide, it may be argued, the withdrawal of the state in the neoliberal regime has led to the creation of a vacuum, especially with regard to socio-economic issues. This has been particularly noticeable in non-rich countries, unblessed by a historically embedded skein of

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<sup>31</sup> The different SAP moments started from a reducing of state budget, creating investment climate, increasing domestic revenues to structural reforms, reducing macroeconomic imbalances further into rearranging tax system and increasing privatisation. (Knowles, 2005: 92-102) The

<sup>32</sup> For interesting insights into the culturalisation effect of the international development machinery generally, see Watts (2006).

charitable foundations. In these states, NGOs were 'conceptualized as a viable alternative' to take over some of the socioeconomic functions previously fulfilled by central government (Wiktorowicz, 2002: 79).

In Jordan, a special kind of NGO primarily fulfils this role, the royal NGOs (RONGOs) – NGOs, that is, with a member of the royal family as president.<sup>33</sup> Several RONGOs are currently active in Wadi Araba, notably the Jordanian Hashemite Fund for Human Development (JOHUD, headed by Princess Basma), the Jordan River Foundation (JRF, with Queen Rania as president) and the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN, no royal president since the death of King Hussein), of which the latter, the JRF and the RSCN, have the main presence in the area. The RSCN and implications of its presence are elaborated on in Chapter 5; here, the JRF is briefly discussed, as an interesting case (JRF will be discussed further in Chapter 4 and 5).

The JRF is what may be termed a 'supply' NGO, one that fulfils those functions – some, at least – from which the state has withdrawn (Clark, 1997; Wiktorowicz, 2002: 83). The JRF is active in projects related to children (supporting kindergartens, play areas, schools), women (schooling, handcrafts), and 'the poor' (agricultural projects, water provision, cooperative support). The target groups of the JRF are actually those most affected by the neoliberal turn taken at the end of the 1990s. After a nationwide poverty assessment conducted by the Jordanian government with the World Bank in 2002, twenty parts of the country were designated as 'Poverty Pockets', areas in which the rate of poverty was measured at above 25%. Many questions can be formulated about the method of the assessment and its aims, but the result was the provision of extra financial resources for the selected areas, to be redistributed through appointed NGOs. With poverty assessed at over 53%, Wadi Araba was designated as one of these Pockets (Personal communication, 2011), and with administration of the extra budget to be managed mostly through the JRF.

This is top-down approach to aid, an old way of imposing projects on people that has, according to the organisations involved, been challenged by internal criticism. As an outcome of these struggles, the JRF has adopted a new method of participation (personal communication, 2010). Now, the JRF tries to capture the needs and challenges faced by communities through participatory practices. The following two chapters (4 and 5) devote more space to the idea of participation; here, of more importance is the perception of Wadi Araba as a starting point for project implementation and evaluation.

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<sup>33</sup> Clearly, these NGOs may be criticised on several grounds, including their less than ideal standards of independence and transparency, but this is not a matter considered here.

The JRF development interventions for Wadi Araba have been spread over different phases and according to the different needs of the three sub-areas into which the JRF divided Wadi Araba. In the different sub-areas of Wadi Araba, the JRF is active with a cluster program that employs certain aims and methods:

This program aims to promote citizen participation in addressing critical needs for the economic and social revitalization of rural community life. (JRF, 2013)

The inclusion of local community representatives in all project stages was excellent. This participation included needs assessment, planning, tendering and awarding contracts for services and goods and implementation. Such involvement has empowered communities and boosted their self-esteem, as well as enhanced their trust in and respect for the implementing organizations. (JRF/MC, 2013)<sup>34</sup>

Community - within in the JRF program for Wadi Araba the communities are Gharandal, Bir Matkhour and Risha - needs are generally expressed in socio-economic terms and addressed in terms of a specification of something missing: a lack of vocational skills, job opportunities, income-generating projects, marketing skills, and so on. Implicit in this 'lack marking' is a call for the need to create awareness and self-esteem (in relation to the opportunities; projects' skills' etc. lacking). This rather unsurprising connection between economic productivity and self-esteem is also of some significance (see below).

The JRF is not the only organisation encouraging people to step into the private sector, be it as an employee or as entrepreneur. Following the now well-established route of micro-financing, various other organisations, such as JOHUD, offer loans or grants so people can start their own business. The idea is that this will make them less dependent on the government as people will make expend more time and energy to make a success of their own business. Despite these efforts, rather few people are applying for the money; they remain rather reluctant. According to one of the NGO interviewees, people continue to prefer governmental employment, which has certain guarantees. The 'culture of shame'<sup>35</sup> together with other cultural aspects are said to be important barriers that keep people away from the private sector (Personal communication, Amman, 2010).

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<sup>34</sup> 'MC' refers to Mercy Corps, an international development organization. At <http://www.jordanriver.jo/>

<sup>35</sup> The culture of shame refers to the (assumed) unwillingness of Bedouins or Jordanian (men) in general to enact certain work (for example household or construction work) that is not recognised with a particular high standard.

Relating culture, economic progress and social development with self-esteem is fairly standard practice for the NGOs mentioned and their approaches to an area and its inhabitants, who are defined as ‘underdeveloped’ or ‘stagnated’ in time (Fabian, 2002). A rather cynical situation has been created. The (RO)NGOs are charged with tasks which the state has withdrawn from, but, at the same time, they need to keep on reinventing their *raison d’être* by integrating themselves and the ‘targeted’ groups into an economic system that has negatively affected those people in the first place.<sup>36</sup>

I would argue that in the projects enabled by development agencies external to the area (national or international), the local people tend to experience the limitations of participation, empowerment and economic liberation. Historically, for decades, and into the present, there have been restrictions on cross-border and intra-national movement in Jordan generally, settlement has been encouraged to the point of enforcement and there remains only limited access to land and water for agriculture. More recently, the SAP agreements brought poverty assessments, but also accompanied by many austerity measures (for example, cuts in subsidies to vital agricultural materials, like animal fodder), which again have negatively impacted on existing economies, such as the Bedouins. Without completely abandonment of traditional (nomadic related) herding related activities, the Bedouin populations of Wadi Araba have arranged their lives accordingly. Most people now mostly actively seek agricultural employment in farming activities organised in the form of (mostly) NGO-supported cooperatives. The details of how these function are thus vital.

Each village in Wadi Araba has at least one functioning agricultural cooperative, and some also have a touristic one. On the one hand, agriculture is organised in the form of a cooperative that installs a direct form of local management and redistribution of profits; but on the other hand, a cooperative is also the only way for people to access agricultural land, since individuals are not entitled to cultivate land in Wadi Araba. Some of the (agriculture and tourism) cooperatives receive support from the JRF as part of the Wadi Araba Community Cluster Development Program, while others do not. Clearly this has been to the disadvantage of some of the locally self-established cooperatives, thus replacing the undesired dependency on the state that central provisioning nurtures against people’s best interests, as it is argued by the anti-command economy approach of neoliberalism, with a new, officially sanctioned dependency, on the development agencies ([RO]NGOs).

On the ground, meanwhile, the development programme framework for cooperative-based agriculture and tourism has enhanced existing local power relations (see below), while for the

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<sup>36</sup> On the relation of NGOs and uneven development, see Bebbington (2004).



NGOs involved it has functioned as a way to compete with other organisations active in the area. As small illustration of this competition, an occurrence during an interview in Amman with Jordan River employees may be related. The workers were explaining how they helped some of the cooperatives by giving, for example, 4x4 vehicles to the Rashayda tourism cooperative of Feynan village. This piece of information was nothing special in itself, except that the interviewee underlined that we should make sure to tell this to the RSCN, since they were not keen on the tourist project planned by the Rashayda tribe themselves close to the protected area of Dana<sup>37</sup>. The reasons why the RSCN took such a view are less important here than the disheartening implications of this for locally based initiatives and communal solidarity at the institutional level. Indeed, observation and interviews in the area indicated very clearly that movement for change taken by individuals is routinely watched and in various ways co-opted, controlled and contained.

During visits to Wadi Araba, one certainly hears that people are not passively waiting for opportunities to come to them. Initiatives are also coming from the people themselves, and they are actively taking part in the (RO)NGO projects – and if they do not, it is not because they do not want to, but because experience has taught them to be careful before allowing promises to become hope and expectations as so many surveys and interviews have passed that have led to nothing concrete. Nevertheless, the capacities of the people in Wadi Araba are not valued very highly. Becoming a farmer or servant is seen as the limit of what can reasonably be expected of them (personal communication, 2012). From this perspective again, there is considerable room for NGOs and government departments to properly legitimise their presence in the area.

### *3.3.3 The Bedouin as commodity*

As illustrated (above), the ‘Jordanian Bedouin culture’, as it may be termed, has served as a national symbol in the creation of an independent Jordan. This was effected in an artificial framework where nation and population needed to be adjusted to fit the shifting requirements of changing circumstances. Begun in colonial times, these processes of culture construction are still at work:

Jordan’s living cultural past carried to the present by the Bedouins is observed not only by foreign, mostly European and American tourists, and by other Arabs, but also by modern Jordanians themselves. Although on the face of it, Bedouin and modern

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<sup>37</sup> The Dana reserve, located at the border of Wadi Araba, and its effects for Wadi Araba inhabitants will more elaborated in chapter 5

Jordanians are living in a synchronic time and in a homologous national space, in reality they are not. The Bedouin is produced as a desert tent-dweller living far away from urban modernity, and as living in a past time, a traditional time, another time, an allochronic time. Her or his geographic location, although nationalized, signifies the past history of the nation, which is contrasted with the urban location of modern Jordanians where the modern nation is always located. The evolutionary implication is that at some point all those who are today identified and identify themselves as Jordanians must have lived like the Bedouins in their evolutionary childhood before they became modern urban adults. (Massad, 2001: 77)

The most visible way to illustrate this process of culturalisation is in its expression through the Jordanian tourist industry. Eco-tourism was established in the Wadi Araba area with the implementation of the Dana nature reserve. In the Wadi Feynan ('old' Feynan), part of Wadi Araba, tourists can spend the night in an eco-lodge, experiencing 'the most diverse flora and fauna in Jordan, where you can unearth the history of an ancient land, and unlock the mysteries of native Bedouin life through the warm welcome of this humble native community'.

Among the strategies to promote tourism in Jordan, the staging of Bedouins is indispensable. Two of Jordan's main touristic attractions, Petra and Wadi Rum, are designed to give the tourist a sense of living (a performed) ancient history, and the development of it in these places only emerged through a complex process of struggle. Some of these struggles seem to repeat themselves in Wadi Araba as it grows into a new (eco-) tourist destination. Frictions arise between national and local actors, for example, but which are not purely 'state versus society, but involve dynamics in which also aspects of localised strategies of adaptation, accommodation and collaboration as dynamic interaction acting both at the local and global levels' (Chatelard, 2005: 197).

This is a key observation related to how a complex of multi-level discourses converge and conflict in the developmental synthesis. It indicates, for example, that in these dynamics, the Bedouins are not just passive victims of the tourist destination that has been created in their areas, and that this introduces the element of localised politics. For example, the few tourist cooperatives present in Wadi Araba are working with the eco-lodge or trying to organise their own tourist projects, such as campsites; one of them is the aforementioned new campsite at Feynan, which has not been encouraged to proceed (for example, by the eco-lodge and the RSCN, for reasons about which one might speculate to range from low appraisal of the local Bedouin abilities to a simple desire – not without irony – to stifle competition). Nevertheless

the people keep on trying to obtain funding for their project, so an ongoing dynamic is in motion.

The inhabitants themselves are indeed taking an active role in the development of tourism in desert areas, working in staged environments, usually segregated from their own homes (village or tent). Of course, we have to be careful not to reduce Bedouin life in Wadi Rum to a play: certain things tourists get to see are part of the 'real' Bedouin culture, while other aspects are displayed to please tourist expectations (Chatelard, 2005).<sup>38</sup> While the type of tourism stimulated and simulated in the areas of Wadi Araba or Wadi Rum is called 'eco-tourism', it is also a form of ethno-tourism, which has 'tourists seeking a cultural encounter of the anthropological kind' (Sylvain, 2005: 356). The constructed colonial image of the Jordanian Bedouin culture has been reinforced by international donors and organisations, (Ro)NGOs, and the state, and is now employed as part of the marketing strategy for tourism in Jordan. This strategy is formulated to answer a growing demand to experience 'the last cultures' before they disappear.<sup>39</sup>

### 3.4 Conclusion

The realm of development as a very de-politicised but deeply political practice has been the subject of research over recent decades. It has been looked at from very different perspectives and approached with a variety of analytical concepts. Here, the (old, little used, obsolete even) notion of *culture* has been invoked and reworked in an analysis of development and its historical background. In sum, I argue that culture matters. It is by looking at the history of Jordan in its development as a state that the political employment of culture comes is exposed. This has been shown most clearly in the institutionalisation of development in Jordan.

This chapter has also considered how difference between people is expressed in terms of culture and instrumentalised as a governmental tool. Cultural differentiation in a society such as Jordan has led to a rather Huntingtonian perception of culture as the key for political and

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<sup>38</sup> This is sometimes referred to as a 'strategic essentialism', whereby imposed identities/cultures are employed to 'secure resources and social, economic and cultural rights' (Sylvain, 2005: 357). In the case of Wadi Araba, the recall of tribal territories has been recently used as a tool to demand access to the land (see also Robins, 2001).

<sup>39</sup> In 2012 I was present at the Dana +10 workshop in Jordan where a revision of *The Dana Declaration on Mobile Peoples and Conservation* was worked out. The general tone towards the indigenous people was one of 'purity'. The aim of the workshop and the declaration was 'ultimately aimed to continue to raise and maintain awareness of the special vulnerabilities and needs of mobile indigenous peoples'. From my perspective this involves a potential to reinforce a conception of mobile cultures that pushes recognition rather further into cultural essentialism instead of getting it away from it.

economic development. Although 'the Bedouin culture' has been perceived as a barrier to economic development in the *badia*, it is now incorporated into the neoliberal market 'as a set of material objects and distinctive behaviours' that can be commodified (Radcliffe, 2006: 234), and is hence able to contribute to the further economic development of the country and enhance its position in the global market. The following two chapters illustrate concerns introduced at the end of this one, namely, how attempts to 'improve' a population through various techniques will always encounter a response from the target population. Just as Glubb experienced it during the Mandate period, so do institutions like the Jordan Valley Authority and approaches like nature conservation organisation meet this in the present day.



## IV. Spatial fantasies and techno-government: rearranging landscape and community in Wadi Araba

The desert is landscape degree zero.<sup>40</sup>

Will the valley become the prototype of a successful rural development strategy that is applicable in other parts of the country, the region, or the world?<sup>41</sup>

### 4.1. Imagine Wadi Araba

It was while driving towards the antique site of Palmyra in Syria in 2010 that I was again introduced to the development perspective of this desert landscape. To reach the site, we had to pass through a small part of desert, upon entering which, one of my fellow taxi-passengers expressed her excitement at all the real estate opportunities presented by this desolated area. My idea of spatial fantasies<sup>42</sup> grew from this, seemingly innocent utterance. The discourse on the economic opportunities that a place may offer is typically invoked in the language used to describe development in Jordan.<sup>43</sup>

After the peace treaty with Israel in 1994, also known as the Wadi Araba Treaty, 'opened' the sub-district Wadi Araba. This semi-arid area had previously been a military area. The combination of a desert-like place and being part of the Jordan Rift Valley, the idea of making the valley bloom regained a place in several planners their imagination. For the whole of Jordan, but especially for its southern border area of Wadi Araba, issues related to water trigger the fantasies: where there is water, life can arise in an area currently perceived as dead.<sup>44</sup>

When talking about 'spatial fantasies' in relation to landscape and community, many different notions are at play and need to be taken in consideration, including relations between the

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<sup>40</sup> W.J.T. Mitchell (2000) referring to R.G. Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967).

<sup>41</sup> Rami Khouri (1981:19)

<sup>42</sup> Homi K. Bhabha also uses the notion of spatial fantasy. The idea introduced here is not inspired by this but it definitely relates closely to it. In Bhabha's conception, there is an attempt to 'universalize the spatial fantasy of modern cultural communities as living their history "contemporaneously", in a "homogeneous empty time" of the People-as-One that finally deprives minorities of those marginal, liminal spaces from which they can intervene in the unifying and totalizing *myths* of the national culture'.

<sup>43</sup> Jordan has a strong history of economic zoning, with Qualified Industrial Zones, Special Economic Zones and Development Zones. See e.g. Pascal De Bruyne (unpublished doctoral thesis, 2013). See also, on zoning technology, Aihwa Ong (2004)

<sup>44</sup> E.g., the 'Valley of Peace' project connecting the Red to the Dead Sea.

See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EzjiUY82E8> (January 30<sup>th</sup>, 2013) This project will be elaborated in the final chapter

two (i.e. landscape and community). Without taking the notion of community for granted and with respect to the existing literature, I refer to it here in the context of a critique on its depoliticised usage with special reference to Nikolas Rose (1999) and Tania Li (1996). The issue of 'landscape' refers as well to the aligned concepts of space and place whereby the latter has gained a central position in anthropological research, mainly in terms of place-making (Appadurai, 1988; Escobar, 2001; Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). Space, on the other hand, has been introduced into the (mainly Marxist inspired) human and political geography to focus on the idea that a place is more than bounded territory, and that it has political relations with other (bounded and unbounded, literal and metaphorical) locations and the (human and non-human) constituent parts that inhabit and construct these (Massey 2005; Swyngedouw 2001).

Starting from the notion of landscape offers an opportunity to engage with a more profound intertwinement of a spatial dimension and its components. The intertwinement that I explore relates to Timothy Ingold's (2000) insight on the relation between landscape and humans.<sup>45</sup> Ingold defines his relational conception of landscape as follows: 'I believe that such a focus might enable us to move beyond the sterile opposition between the naturalistic view of the landscape as a neutral, external backdrop to human activities, and the culturalistic view that every landscape is a particular cognitive or symbolic ordering of space. I argue that we should adopt, in place of both these views, what I have called a "dwelling perspective", according to which the landscape is constituted as an enduring record of – and testimony to – the lives and works of past generations who have dwelt within it, and in so doing, have left there something of themselves' (Ingold, 2000:189). I embrace this perspective as very value, but with the aim of the chapter I want to develop the range and underline the importance of this intertwinement of landscape and community as an arena of power. Ingold expresses his perspective on dwelling as an 'empowerment' way to achieve a better understanding of, in his case, hunters and their environment. In the realm of development, but not restricted to it, one can also observe a certain relational idea of people and their environment, but one in which the representation of landscape involves also a further representation of its inhabitants, as the *community*. In the case of Wadi Araba, the poor state of the infrastructure in the area represents in a development perspective also the people's state of being. The idea goes further that by bringing infrastructure, people's life will be better. The use of this mutual representation as a measure to intervene creates friction, as it does not take into

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<sup>45</sup> Many other authors also refer to landscape in terms of a relational understanding, but tend to maintain a nature-culture distinction and not go beyond this as Ingold does. For example, Moore approaches landscape as a mix of what he calls 'historical sedimented practices' with an 'environmental milieu', which, in my view serves to reify the nature-culture binary (Moore, 2006).

account other perspectives on the relation between landscape and 'community'. The main argument of this chapter, therefore, is that these mutual representations – of community and of landscape as an arena of power – should also be introduced into developmental intervention, in this case, with regard to Wadi Araba.

In this chapter, I explore this mutual representation from a perspective on the intersection of governable spaces<sup>46</sup> and representational spatialisation. The idea is that in development practice, actors do not just work with imagined communities but with fantasised ones. The difference is that a fantasised community in its relation to landscape (equally fantasised) is based on the thought of how it (i.e. nation, culture, community, individual etc.) should be and not how one think it is. These fantasies are often expressed through interventions in landscape. It is here that we can observe the effects of the triangle of community, landscape and power. The component of power will be explained in terms of techno-government. Techno-government is a way of governing (not exclusively by the state) by which political dilemmas are translated in technical obstacles that require technical solutions; hence, the de-politicisation of existing realities. This process of de-politicisation has the potential to mute or select certain voices to be heard. Accordingly, the creation and re-defining of power relations brings Michel Foucault again into the picture.

Despite the amount of existing literature on rural development, the topic of this chapter has also grown out of a concern for a trend whereby it is urban areas that are primarily addressed in relation to development. Processes of gentrification or upgrading are often – entirely correctly – linked up to a simultaneous process of uneven development and its (detrimental) effects on a societal level.<sup>47</sup> Certainly, the speed of urban transformation is profound. I would contend that such theories about improvement or development apply also to what are defined as rural areas.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> With reference to Nikolas Rose (1999); Mainly his 'irrealism' (which is a reality) is 'technical, not psychologistic'. 'It is technical in so far as it asserts that thought constructs its unreal worlds through very material procedures. Thought, that is to say, becomes real by harnessing itself to a practice of inscription, calculation and action (Rose, 1999:32)

<sup>47</sup> See for example David Harvey (2006), *Spaces of Global Capitalism: A Theory of Uneven Geographical Development* or Neil Smith (2010) *Uneven Development: Nature, Capital, and the Production of Space*

<sup>48</sup> An interesting debate has been developing on the rural-urban distinction, problematizing, for example, the tendency for the rural to be understood in terms of the urban, defined as that which the urban is not. An investigation of the category 'rural' is beyond the scope of this chapter, but it seems clear that we do have to go beyond the inherent rigidity of the simplistic urban-rural distinction to be able to grasp the more complex dynamics occurring on the ground. See M. Ozürk, A. Hilton and J. Jongerden (forthcoming) 'Migration as Movement and Multiplace Life: Some Recent Developments in Rural Living Structures in Turkey'



The main arguments for the formation of the chapter are abstracted from several field visits to Jordan, Wadi Araba between 2009 and 2012. The data related to these is mainly derived from interviews with the actors involved and inspection of official documents.

The chapter consists of three parts, with the notions of landscape and community addressed separately in the first two before being brought together as a single nexus in the third. In the first part, I introduce and develop the idea of spatial fantasies, which refers to the imagination of spaces and how, at the same time, this can be reified. The central question here is, 'How are these fantasies visible in certain development theories and practices?' Then, in the second part, I elaborate on fantasised communities. Here, I look at some of the existing literature on the issues of community to address the (problematic) usage of this concept. In the third and final part, the meeting of landscape and community as described is facilitated through a Foucauldian perspective. From this Foucauldian point of view I emphasise further the power and government that a mutual representation of landscape and community contains. This is again not in the idea of Ingold who asks for recognition for a intertwined existence of human and landscape, but about the rationale that by rearranging landscape inhabitants will change accordingly (i.e. reduce their deviances).

Ultimately, this chapter highlights struggles over the representation of landscape and its inhabitants, or people and their landscape. By approaching these as co-existing entities, we can think about how representational discourses of place and people are deployed in the de-politicizing process of the development praxis.

## **4.2 A fantasised landscape**

### ***4.2.1 Landscape, development and power***

Wadi Araba is a semi-arid area in the south of Jordan stretching for over 130km between the Dead Sea and the Red Sea. There are about 7000 settled inhabitants living the area, a figure that rises to 9000 when the nomadic population is included (DOS, 2011). Wadi Araba remains relatively unexplored area by social scientists, although it has been the subject of a fair amount of archaeological and geological research.

Seeing a landscape and its people through the eyes of development planners has formed a substantial literature. In the case of Jordan, Mauro Van Aken has done excellent work on the transformation of the Jordan Valley<sup>49</sup> landscape and its inhabitants north of the Dead Sea:

The ways of representing this place [the Jordan Valley] by development engenders a set of discourses and images that [have] had a major impact in the patterns of understanding the inhabitants of this area: the definition of the place, in terms of representation, has been in fact the medium to define local communities. (Van Aken, 2005:165)

Although the Jordan Valley area is different in many aspects from Wadi Araba, we can draw significant parallels when comparing the two at the level of discourse and the worldview that development actors there exhibit. From many perspectives of national and international governmental and non-governmental actors, the Wadi Araba appears as 2400 square kilometres of vacant territory, a place that is empty except for a few people and meagre infrastructure:

This is a virgin area, in which little has happened for decades, other than the arrival of the absentee landlord and the partial settlement of the Bedouins. Tribal relations are relatively in-tact. The needs are tremendous, and some major decisions and investments will be needed to bring this area into the mainstream of Jordanian life. (Dajani, 1979)

The consent that Wadi Araba is merely another out-of-the-way place (Tsing, 1993; 1994) at the southern border with Israel, the last frontier (Khouri, 1981), or a white spot on the land-use plan for the Jordan Valley only makes this place even more fascinating for research about landscape and people, as in reality people do live there. I will take this perception of empty lands as a representation of the area to further illustrate the idea of spatial fantasies.

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<sup>49</sup> Use of the term 'Jordan Valley' for the areas both north and as well as south of the Dead Sea invokes a conceptualization generally used by governmental institutions, notably the Jordan Valley Authority. Initially responsible mainly for the area north of the Dead Sea, in 1977 the Jordan Valley Authority was given the mandate for the southern parts part of the Jordan Valley, in addition to the northern by the Government of Jordan (Dajani et al., 1980:20).

Inhabitants of the different area would generally refer to the Ghor (the northern part) or Wadi Araba (south). In this chapter, I refer to the north as the 'Jordan Valley' and the south as the 'Southern Ghors' and 'Wadi Araba.' So, when further notion is made in this chapter to the Jordan Valley it always refers to the area on the Jordanian side, east from of the River Jordan.

The notion of landscape has been elaborated on many times. W.J.T. Mitchell's work, *Holy landscape: Israel, Palestine and the American Wilderness* is especially illuminating on this issue. As he remarks landscape – referring to a human-nonhuman habitat – is 'often explored as a place of amnesia and erasure, a strategic site for burying the past and veiling history with "natural beauty" (Mitchell W.J.T., 2000: 195). In concrete terms for the Jordan Valley, Van Aken points out that this landscape has long become an object of transformation, represented ideally, as a *tabula rasa*, to be shaped according to exogenous and culturally determined ideas of habitat and space (Van Aken: 2005:154). Piotr Bienkowski (2006), an archaeologist working cross-border (Jordan/Israel) in Wadi Araba, makes the following observation:

Wadi Arabah is a paradox: it was never a boundary, it became a political border by default, but now it has been renamed, reconfigured and redefined as a barrier separating two mutually exclusive historical and cultural identities, in the past as well as in the present.<sup>50</sup> (Bienkowski, 2006 :20)

The selectivity in perception and the recognition of the existing realities of Wadi Araba can be related to remarks made by the two aforementioned authors attesting to the fact that there never really was an integrated development scheme for the Wadi Araba, unlike in the case of the northern part of the Jordan Rift Valley. In the many socioeconomic surveys of the Jordan (Rift) Valley, Wadi Araba and the Southern Ghors are referred to as the mere southern extensions of the Valley.

The Jordan Valley became the focus of the 'unified development', an external planning intervention and modernization process in agriculture presented as a holistic approach, integrating the entire area and different aspects of [a] farmer's life. (Van Aken, 2005:152)

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<sup>50</sup> Bienkowski has an important point about the role of Wadi Araba in antiquity, particularly in 'Biblical' periods, especially in respect of the impact of the border that has been drawn between what is known today as Negev and Wadi Araba on our present understanding of this broader area: 'The Wadi Arabah and the Negev were re-made as part of a modern Land of Israel to create ideological continuity between the past and the present – or rather, there was an iterative relationship between past and present, one substantiating the other ... Wadi Arabah is a paradox: it was never a boundary, it became a political border by default, but now it has been renamed, reconfigured and redefined as a barrier separating two mutually exclusive historical and cultural identities, in the past as well as in the present'. (Bienkowski, 2006:20)

When the massive displacement of Palestinians after 1948 created an influx of refugees into Jordan, implementation of the (already existing) idea of an integrated development scheme for the Jordan Valley received further impetus, as the refugees became interesting targets for vacancies of farming. The difference in historical background is to be taken into consideration also for the difference in approach of the Jordan state towards the different areas of the Jordan Rift Valley, such as Wadi Araba.

This chapter will not be a plea for integrated approaches in the 'ideology' of the dominant international development discourses of development, but it should be noted that the absence of or failure to implement such approaches has consequences on the ground. In the end, although there were initiatives for a Jordan Rift Valley development-overarching project for Wadi Araba and the Jordan Valley was, in fact, executed. While the Jordan Valley became a main object of development for Jordan, Wadi Araba remained a southern outskirts. Since 1994, this has implied that different governmental (Ministry of Agriculture, Ministry of Planning, Jordan Valley Authority, etc.) and nongovernmental (Jordan River Foundation, JOHUD, Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature, Hashemite Fund for Development of the Jordan Badia, etc.) actors now individually plan for the same territory.

In the Wadi Araba case, all the different projects are described as seeds for empowerment and progress. A whole range of initiatives has been implemented, from conventional farming inputs to organic agriculture, and renovation of schools and provision of bus shelters to nature conservation and tourism promotion. These initiatives can be seen from a planner's perspective as both individually feasible and, taken together, complementary. But on the ground each of them works in its own way.<sup>51</sup> During the course of this research, the actors involved in directing these initiatives raised the issue of cooperation, stating that there was no or only limited cooperation and, moreover, that there was no direct need for more. The different development actors may have the best of intentions and possess clear visions of how the civic spaces they are working toward should look and function; nevertheless, may it be that, as Tania Li observes in respect of the mountains of Indonesia, in the margins of Jordan too, a lack of a cooperative structure is problematic:

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<sup>51</sup> Paul Kingston refers to similar trends during the 1950s. Due to a weak central power and the absence of an opposition, foreign donors could easily find a position in the realm of development in Jordan. 'This had an interesting impact on the Jordanian state,' he explains, since 'each actor in the development field created its own administrative apparatus,' referring to Point Four for the US and the UK's Jordan Development Board (Kingston, 1994:194)

The multiplicity of power, the many ways that practices position people, the various modes 'playing across one another' produce gaps and contradictions. Subjects formed in these matrices ... encounter inconsistencies ... Further, powers once experienced as diffuse, or indeed not experienced as powers at all, can become the subject of a critical consciousness. (Li, 2007:25-26)

Such a critique and its political implications are of less immediate concern here, than the construction of the planning ideology itself. Nevertheless, this citation does illustrate well the setting wherein the politics of development are at play and how this is not to be regarded as if it exists in a vacuum.<sup>52</sup> Crucially, the group of people most directly targeted by the development initiatives are not the people who live there, the Bedouins, but rather the fantasised Bedouins of the various project proposals. The visions of development neither emanate from nor start with the different realities that people actually experience, which are thus not successfully envisioned, if at all. The process in Wadi Araba is rather similar in this respect to that of the Jordan Valley:

[S]ince this region has been delimited, planned, designed, transformed as a 'Project Area', the people living in it have been assimilated in the set of problems, needs, strategies of solutions of development: refugees have become 'farmer operators', notwithstanding their cultural practices, [and] their effective and multiple needs and problems. (Van Aken, 2005: 165)

To clarify the fantasies for Wadi Araba as a landscape, I will briefly describe two initiatives that are representative of the imaginations from the past and the present with regard to the area. These two examples are intertwined on many levels, including what I would term the inter-causal relationship of settlement and agriculture (when people engage in agriculture, they settle, and when they settle – or are settled – they begin doing agriculture). The first example sketches the housing projects aimed at the Bedouin population of the Jordan *badia*, and the second the (state-sponsored) development of agriculture there.

#### *4.2.2 Housing provision*

The idea for the settlement of the (semi-)nomadic pastoral population in Jordan started effectively during the British mandate period (1918-1948) up to the end of the 1950-1970 era. This new development scheme for settlement was envisioned for the greater region of the

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<sup>52</sup> See below.

Middle East and supported by international heavyweights such as the UN, Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) and International Labour Organisation (Bocco, 2006:305). The sedentarization philosophy was based on the presumption that Bedouin nomadism is a 'primitive social state' (Bocco, 2006:302-304). The settlement of the Bedouin was orchestrated around wells, dams, or (existing) water infrastructure, and planned to 'encourage the development of agriculture and the constructions of villages' (Bocco, 2006:315).

Whether or not the settlement of Jordanian Bedouin has been imposed on the nomadic population is a disputed issue. Abu Jaber and Gharaibeh (1981) argue that there was never an issue of forced settlement by the state of Jordan and that the efforts to settle Bedouins brought more humane and lasting results (Abu Jaber & Gharaibeh, 1981:294). Nobody can deny people the right to educate their children in schools or to have access to proper healthcare, but one might wonder which new power relations were enhanced by the implementation of these efforts. As Bocco remarks, regardless of whether the sedentarisation process was forced or voluntary, it certainly was perceived in terms of social and economic integration as a 'veritable cure-all' (Bocco, 2006:311)

The search for official documents on housing projects specifically in Wadi Araba is not an easy task. Knowing that for example the Jordanian Ministry of Agriculture (MoA) had an important stake in the settlement of the Bedouin population, I could hardly find a single MoA official able to explain how the distribution of houses either today or in the past came about in the different *badia* areas. Especially when asking about Wadi Araba and housing or land distribution, the general answer is 'Wadi Araba is a special case'. Nevertheless, houses with small plots of land have been effectively distributed there. The decade between 1970 and 1980 brought significant changes, among and an important catalyst for which was the construction of the Dead Sea Highway extension from Ghor Safi to Aqaba. Running straight through Wadi Araba, this was one of the main things that had vivified the area, as local interviewees testified.

The locations where people in the end settled and made villages were mainly places that had functioned as seasonal resting places or close to their tribal areas. Interviews with people there gave a sense of mixed reasons for settlement. As mentioned, the extension of the highway was a focal point (or line) around which to settle in order to better access services, but most importantly education along with medical care: where the government organised schools, people would go and settle to send their children to them. As such, one could think

of their settlement as a strategy employed by the state to exert control over the nomadic segment of its population. However, it is also reasonable to suppose that the people themselves were looking for a fixed place. Conditions in the desert were getting tougher every year, due to other restrictive policies on nomadic lifestyles. Well-known examples include the establishment of national boundaries<sup>53</sup> and the abolition of fodder subsidies and grazing restrictions. Alan Rowe (2006) illustrates both of these aspects of the issue with his research on the Bedouin inhabitants of the north-eastern *badia*, referring to the same period of 'transition' from tents to permanent housing:

The reasons for this transition are complex, but certainly include the establishment of state borders and the extension of state infrastructure and services into the *badiya* area. (Rowe, 2006:603)<sup>54</sup>

The fixed villages located within Wadi Araba were all established between the mid 1970s and early 2000s. Of interest in the deployment of each is its relation to the institution of the monarchy. The connection is mostly with one specific member of the royal family. Sharif Nasser, Princess Basma, the late King Hussein or Abdullah II, all are perceived as patrons of parts of the area. By surprise visits or promises made on television, the monarchy seems to be at the doorstep of Wadi Araba.<sup>55</sup> Regardless of whether or not the bond with the royal family may be stronger in the people's minds than it is in reality, it does give people a tool to speak up and claim their needs at the higher echelons. And since the uprisings in neighbouring countries and the tensions in Jordan itself, there is more space for such claims. So far, people in Wadi Araba have not turned against the king, but they are aware of the value of their loyalty to him and the monarchy.

Development planners emphasise that the distribution of houses in Wadi Araba occurred as part of the civilisation/pacification of the area. One informant working with a development institution in Wadi Araba described a bathroom and a kitchen in terms of 'civic space,' a type of space that is simply not available in a tent; hence, a tent is not a civic space. Tents are clearly recognised by all development actors as a symbol of the Bedouin culture and should, it is accepted, maintain a place in their lives – but one next to a house of bricks.

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<sup>53</sup> The Hida' agreement in November 1925, concluded that Hijazi and Transjordanian tribes could no longer cross the borders between the two countries without proper documents. See Massad (2001:52)

<sup>54</sup> With reference to R. Dutton 'Population, environment and development' in R. Dutton, J. Clarke, A. Battakhi (eds), *Arid Land Resources and their Management: Jordan's Desert Margins* (London: Kegan Paul International 1998).

<sup>55</sup> Linda Layne for example points to the late king Hussein as the ultimate Jordanian gift-giver as he distributed gifts before others could offer him a gift. (Layne, 1994:146 in Van Aken, 1999:19).

Initiatives related to housing not only connect people to a fixed place but also to a power system of costs and obligations. During one of my field visits, I observed how the first electricity bills entered the village of Feynan for the people who received houses in the early 2000s. For 50 months, the Jordanian electricity company had not collected any payments from the inhabitants. Now that the company was mostly in private hands, employees were sent to gather the money from the outstanding accounts, some of which had accrued as much as 800 Jordanian dinars (over 1100 USD). After all this time, people had thought that the electricity supply came with the house, for free. The distribution and collecting of the bills I experienced happened in the tent of one of the informants. In the tent several other men had gathered to meet the money collector. One of the men present, who never moved from his tent to a concrete house, remarked that they could all go back to living in their tents so they would not have to worry about bills anymore – a suggestion which was not taken up, however.

#### *4.2.3 Agricultural development*

Agriculture has always played a key role in the history of development for Jordan and the region. Issues related to land, such as access and allocation, were decisive, for example, in the construction of the Hashemite Kingdom as we know it today. Michael Fischbach (2000) has described this in his fascinating work on the relationships of land to people and power:

To no small degree social forces in modern Jordan have been linked to land and land tenure. Despite the image sometimes propagated that it was a 'Bedouin' society, Jordan from the 1850s – 1950s remained at heart a country of small-scale, settled cultivators for whom private control of land defined life. (Fischbach, 2000:1)

Again, it was during the mandate period that the focus on agricultural development came to the fore. The mandated authorities set up a development department, financed by the British Colonial Development Fund, to administer and plan projects (Bocco, 2006:315). Moves toward agricultural development not only encouraged agriculture but also took their place as part of a sedentarisation policy, in the manner referred to as 'intercausal'. In many ways it seems that agricultural investments were specifically intended to transform the nomadic Bedouin into settled farmers.<sup>56</sup> The process of turning Palestinian refugees into farmers in

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<sup>56</sup> The incorporation of Bedouins into the Desert Patrol in the early years of 1930 was another strategy to connect them to the central powers and hence settle them. See for example Bocco & Chatelard (2009) or Massad (2001)



the Jordan Valley to contribute to Jordan's 'Green Revolution'<sup>57</sup> paralleled the sedentarization projects designed for the settlement of Bedouin tribes in the Middle East (Van Aken, 2005:152). The designation of the Palestinian refugees as future farmers has been a clear example of the depoliticisation of the presence of the refugees. The transformation of the Jordan Valley was based on an intensive approach of development, mainly based on the input of technology. The agricultural projects for Wadi Araba are rather small scale, but reflect - as Van Aken points out in relation to the Jordan Valley - a pure technical understanding of Wadi Araba.

The Jv is looked upon only as economic reality, where production becomes the main criteria of judgment and evaluation. The definition of a region through implicit indicators and value has determined also the way in understanding the local—although often dislocated—populations 'farmers' and 'peasant community'. This technical understanding of the Jv and its inhabitants has been a major pattern in neutralizing refugees' political context and hiding the social environment and local strategies that lie behind the effective management of resources. (Van Aken, 1999:7)

As Michael Fischbach illustrates, agriculture has always been an important activity in Jordan, included in which is that of the Bedouins, who often had small-scale agricultural side activities. The sizes of the agricultural projects in the Jordan Valley or in Wadi Araba are extremely different. The scale of Wadi Araba is small and local, while the Jordan Valley is grand scheme and (inter)nationally oriented. What I want to emphasise, however, is the overlap in rationale and method of a depoliticisation of a social environment as Wadi Araba.

In 2007, a very large grant was received from the Arab Fund from Kuwait for a special Wadi Araba Development Unit. Pushed forward by King Abdullah II, this project has had a management or regulatory authority that moved between different institutions, including the Aqaba Special Economic Zone Authority (ASEZA) and today's Jordan Valley Authority (JVA). Besides small-scale initiatives for the improvement of the different villages (bus shelter, restoration school walls, play grounds etc.), the project also includes the development of about four agricultural model farms, which is accompanied by the distribution of land to inhabitants. People will thereby become owners of the land, which, as mentioned before, is

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57 Sharif Elmusa offers a detailed insight in the role of agriculture in the development of the Valley. Most interestingly here is that Elmusa places agriculture not only in an economic but also a (techno)political context. In addition to the multi-perspective approach, he also draws attention to the multiple scales of analysis (regional, state and international) with which agriculture can be approached.

rare in the area to date. Most of the land in Wadi Araba is formally state-owned land, although there are tribal customary land claims on it. While there have been practical concessions regarding customary claims, they have largely been ignored in legal terms (Palmer et al., 2007:52).

The access of people from Wadi Araba to employment and land is very limited. The land in Wadi Araba has been effectively frozen since 2005, when further steps were taking for the construction of a water conveyor between the Red Sea and the Dead Sea. This freezing means a hold on land between the two bodies of water to prevent its sale/purchase.<sup>58</sup> The agricultural part of the Wadi Araba project comprises four fields in the surroundings of four villages. At the moment of writing, one field in the Wadi Fidan, close to the village of Gregra and measuring 1940 *dunums*<sup>59</sup> (194 hectares), is prepared for agricultural activity. A total of 97 potential farmers from the villages could apply for a piece of land of 20 *dunums*, with the selected people/families entitled to use of the land and the harvest. Here, the distribution of the farms created Li's 'critical consciousness' (above), since this created a lot of friction about who was rightfully entitled to the land. The allocation criteria were well thought out – tribes with already limited access to land would get priority, the same idea being used for employment at the water station, etc. – but were challenged in such a way that the JVA had to place the distribution of the fields at Wadi Fidan on hold, even though it was ready for use.

Changes in a landscape are often related to total makeovers through megalomaniac development projects. During conferences one can see and be amazed by the (critical) research done on the planned transformations of for instance Beirut, Damascus, or Rabat into new Dubais as it were. I have used Wadi Araba at those conferences as an example for planned makeovers to argue that these transformations or developments tend to assume space as a given. My point would be that large-scale or small-scale infrastructural initiatives in a place like Wadi Araba also come with certain reflections about the place and its inhabitants. The difference could between a plan for Beirut or Wadi Araba could be that a new design for cities are regarded as representations of modernity while the plans for Wadi Araba are rather written as a design for a 'descent life'. The description of the Arab Fund supported project is here illustrative

The project falls under the Wadi Araba Region Development Program, which aims at transferring the region from a poor, low density populated area into a more attractive

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<sup>58</sup> See below in chapter six.

<sup>59</sup> *Dunum*: Middle Eastern unit of measurement for area for land.

residential area that provides a hospitable environment for business activities and investments. (website MOPIC 2013)

In the next part I explain how the design of a descent life is channelled through adaptations in a landscape.

### **4.3 A fantasised community**

*Community is a fundamental modality for the conduct of modern politics.* (Watts, 2004:195)

As Tania Li remarks, 'community development programs also initiate the creation of a new collective subject, a community... [that] will have to engage into certain activities that lead [it] to [become] the right community in the right place' (Li, 2007:15). Wadi Araba might be such a right place. The development agents I talked to and the surveys that document the situation of Wadi Araba all emphasise the potential of this place and its inhabitants. At the same time, however, the potentials of both place and people are routinely described as limited.

The idea of Wadi Araba as a forgotten place and thus in need of 'development' is also a reflection of the portrayal of its people. The human cultures in Wadi Araba are associated with a lifestyle and mentality located in a different time, in the human developmental or evolutionary past. To have them enter the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the area needs the right injections of development. Johannes Fabian's (1983, 2007) 'denial of coevalness' is of much use in grasping the rationale behind certain development initiatives.

The notion of a denial of coevalness refers to the effect of representation in ethnographic work, that when 'ethnographers represent their knowledge in teaching and writing they do this in terms of a discourse that constitutently places those who are talked about in a time other than that of the one who talks' (Fabian, 2007:22). It might be a little blunt to simply replace 'ethnographers' with 'development planners', but one cannot help but observe the similar patterning of discourse. It is illustrated, for example, in one of the 2004 preliminary land use studies for the Valley:

The Southern Jordan Valley Study Area (SJVSA) is the Southern Ghors and Wadi Araba, an arid environment graced by the unique desert environment of Wadi Araba, including the *living heritage* of 'Beduoin' tribes, that is forming the basis under RSCN for a nature based tourism industry'. (Chesrown, 2004:142)

An example of this nature tourism and representation of the people of the Wadi Araba area is to be found in the Dana protected area. Partly located in Wadi Araba, this was established by the Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature (RSCN) in 1994.<sup>60</sup> The 'pristine' area of the Dana reserve offers modernity a window on Bedouin traditional life. No building is permitted for the local population who live in the reserve, and the areas of the Wadi Araba where tourists are mainly guided are those in the Dana reserve populated by inhabitants living in tents. The idea is to offer tourists an authentic experience. In addition to its status as small-scale agricultural hub, therefore, Wadi Araba is currently designated as an eco-tourism destination, and the local population hence transformed into either farmers or ethnological décor.

The idea of turning Bedouins into farmers is certainly not new in Jordan. Pilot settlement projects for Bedouin families began in the early years of the 1960s, organised by the MoA and the World Food Program (WFP). A settled Bedouin area in the south-eastern *badia* of Jaffa near the city of Ma'an was one such. It is no coincidence that this happened in Jordan at that point in time. As Bocco states, it was in this same period that the FAO in cooperation with the WFP initiated for the greater region of Jordan a 'series of projects to set up agricultural colonies in the steppe areas (Bocco, 2006:305).

Most people today in Wadi Araba are indeed settled in villages, mainly in brick houses. Although they appear to have generally either asked for settlement or built their houses themselves, the general settlement process has been structured by a discourse around brick house ownership. Used for housing projects and infrastructural development in general as well as in specific regard to Wadi Araba, this discourse does not just refer to the necessity of bricks. At the same time, it reveals views on the candidate 'target group' or community for whom the houses are intended. In the denial of coevalness, the living conditions previous to the settlement programs and as such also the people living in those conditions are approached as entities located in an essentially past time. The area and its inhabitants are not described as 'savage' anymore, but as poor people living in a 'remote' time or 'neglected' by time. The key focus for development planners has been to guide these poor communities into modernity through infrastructural injections of capital, primarily in the form of housing and agriculture as an economic opportunity.

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<sup>60</sup> The RSCN and its relations and interventions in the area will be more elaborated in next chapter.

Whether on the issue of housing or agriculture, the actors involved certainly do take 'tradition' and 'community' into consideration nowadays. However, this is still often expressed in very culturalistic terms. Many ideas about 'community' that are used today in the development plans or initiatives for social, political or economic progress are not, in fact, very different from the colonial schemes for modernisation. The relationship between development discourse or practice and historical colonisation is not new, and is well documented.<sup>61</sup> It is very interesting also in this respect to note the similarities to what is happening on a smaller scale in Wadi Araba with, for example, the work of Victoria Bernal (1997) on the Gezira scheme in Sudan. Bernal describes what ultimately became the largest centrally-managed irrigation project in the world after starting operations in 1925 and continues to operate today under the management of the Sudanese government thus:

While treating the Gezira region in practice as a cultural and agricultural tabula rasa, the British selectively drew on local 'tradition' as a rationale for colonial policy. Even as they represented the Gezira Scheme as 'modern, scientific' agriculture, colonial authorities sought to legitimate some of their policies by locating their origin in Sudanese 'tradition'. (Bernal, 1997:455)

The approach towards the people of Wadi Araba is not one of an invention of traditions but rather a reduction to a one-size-fits-all that fails to differentiate between, for example, the Bedouins in Feynan and those in Rahme, a nearby village. The tribes that are living in those two villages are different families and relate to other areas inside and outside Jordan. The locations of the agricultural projects directed by the JVA come under the banner of scientific determination with regard to soil quality or water availability, but they divide the different tribal groups into almost hermetically sealed formations, each fixed to its space. Unfortunately for the project, however, these groups have also their relations outside the area. In the case of the field developed by the agricultural project referred to, which has been prepared for use through a lot of effort with regard to road access and water supply, people from other villages and even outside Wadi Araba have come to claim a share, perceived as *their* part of the land. Despite having grown considerably in its knowledge of and approach towards Wadi Araba and the inhabitants, the JVA remains predominately technocratic in its ways of thinking and implementation.

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<sup>61</sup>The relationship between the colonial past and development strategies today is not to be understood as a linear continuum, however. Hewitt and Duffield point out very clearly that 'it is rather [that] the will to power that shaped it (i.e. colonialism) lives on through new institutions and actors' (Hewitt & Duffield, 2009:14). See also Escobar (1995), Cooke (2003), Kothari (2005)

While it stands as no justification for the continuation of such an approach, it is true that little documentation exists on the social and economic structures in Wadi Araba.<sup>62</sup> Since the beginning of the present century, generalised surveys have been performed and nearly always in relation to a particular development scheme, and which then are kept behind the closed doors of the institutions involved.<sup>63</sup> The gap in knowledge on the area and people of Wadi Araba is another point of resemblance to the Gezira scheme:

The realities of economic and social life in the Gezira region prior to the irrigation scheme were not well documented. Thus colonial actors could alternatively ignore or invent the local past and Sudanese 'tradition' as it suited them. (Bernal, 1997:455)

The notion of community in both colonial and development policies has been well documented by social scientists since Benedict Anderson (1983) wrote his ideas on *Imagined Communities* in the early 1980s. Tania Li and Nicolas Rose are two examples among many of those who have shed light on this ubiquitous concept. In their first critical analyses almost 15 years ago, these researchers reached out for ways to understand the concept of community from a political perspective. They made the use of the concept of community in (development) discourses as a tool for power. Michael Watts (2004) also remarks:

There does not exist a simply genealogy of the modern deployment of community. But throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the idea of the community was 'a fundamental political institution within European colonial systems' ... and constructed as part of the construction of the modern. Community, not just of the modern imagined nation ... but all manner of local community, are 'political' ... and 'represented' ... communities to be read against the modern state, the nation and history. (Watts, 2004:197) <sup>64</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Interesting existing literature see Palmer et al. (2007), Lancaster and Lancaster (1999), Bienkowski (2006)

<sup>63</sup> By way of a personal experience, the most remarkable reason for not giving a printout of a survey report was the possibility that we, as researchers, might be critical of it (Personal communication with MOPIC employee, Jordan, 2012).

<sup>64</sup> With reference to J. Kelly and J.M. Kaplan, *Represented Communities* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 5 ; G. Pandey, Some Notes on the Modern Political Community, Paper presented to the School of American Research, Santa Fe, Workshop on 'The Romance of Community', April 2003; B. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

The term 'community' in places such as the Jordanian *badia* is often employed in combination with the adjective 'traditional'. Especially during the beginning of the formation of the state of Jordan, many questions were raised in respect of what to do with the wild tribes that ruled the steppe areas and terrorised villages. The pacification and assimilation of the Bedouins seemed a reasonable answer. The name of J.B. Glubb, also known as 'Glubb Pasha', has today become synonymous for this process in the country. The idea of pacification and assimilation seems not to have emerged from a dislike of the Bedouin tribes, but rather from certain empathy, as Kamel Abu Jaber (1981) informs us:

Raised among the tribes of Saudi Arabia, as was the tradition of his family, he [Emir Abdullah I] developed a fair amount of sympathy for, and empathy with, the Bedouins and their needs. Under his guidance and direction, the commander of the Jordanian army, J.B. Glubb, too, developed a technique for dealing with the Bedouins, slowly but surely acculturating them to a more disciplined life with a more sophisticated hierarchy and a central national authority. (Abu Jaber & Gharaibeh, 1981:295)

In his *Colonial Effects*, Joseph Massad has illustrated the incorporation of the Bedouin population as part of the construction of the country. Before 1976, Bedouins were actually considered as aliens in Jordan:

These laws governing the Bedouins as a separate category of nationals and citizens were viewed as transitional, facilitating the integration of the Bedouins within the framework of the juridical nation-state. This, the Jordanian government felt, was achieved in 1976. That year, a law canceling all previous tribal laws including the Law of Supervising the Bedouins was enacted, thus ushering the Bedouins into the world of the nation-state as equal to and no longer a distinct species of citizen-nationals. (Massad, 2001:52)

In legal terms, Bedouins are part of the state of Jordan, but on the ground and especially in the case of Wadi Araba, the idea of the inhabitants as still not completely integrated into modernity is very present and powerful.

The general opinion (of officials, NGO staff and others) is that it is fine to stay a Bedouin at heart, but now it is time to look for alternative lifestyles. Becoming a farmer is one of the options. This recalls Van Aken's idea mentioned above with regard to a purely technical

understanding of a place and its inhabitants. Wadi Araba is perceived as an economic reality but not quite as in the case of the Jordan Valley. The economic reality of Wadi Araba is rather expressed in terms of poverty: the local infrastructure is poor, as is its population. In 2008 around 69% of the population were categorised as living in poverty. Wadi Araba has been designated as part of the Poverty Pocket Program since its inception in 2002/2003 (Personal communication with Department of Statistics, 2012). The list of places in Jordan that are defined as Poverty Pockets has been re-evaluated so there is movement of places on and off the list. Extra funding is provided for development in the enlisted places. Wadi Araba is one of those places since the beginning. In the Poverty Pockets program, royal NGOs such as the Jordan River Foundation have constructed community development programmes to enhance progress. The area of Wadi Araba as a Poverty Pocket is under the umbrella of the Jordan River Foundation to enhance development initiatives.<sup>65</sup> As already stated, there is a certain belief in the potential of the area, a limited but nevertheless real potential.

Important here is the way in which community has become 'both a means of problematisation and of solution' (Rose, 2004:173). This is exactly how Rose describes the sense of community that is so dominant in the development rationale of the various actors involved in Wadi Araba. As it is a place physically remote from the central government in Amman, the best option for change in the area from a developmental point of view depends on the will or the morale of the people. The people of Wadi Araba are discouraged from waiting for the government to act or from hoping for state employment. The idea is that it is partly because of the unwillingness of the local community to initiate action themselves that they are in a deprived situation. This rationale has two sides. On the one side, it are the people themselves who can turn the tide to become a successful community – albeit, of course, steered or managed by present institutions as the NGOs. The other side is that when projects fail or people take a different direction, it proves again that it is due to the (lack of) will or morale of the community that they do not move forward. The ultimate responsibility for what is happening today with the agricultural projects steered by the JVA or the nature conservation projects managed by the RSCN is mainly laid on the culture of the area. This is again very similar to the response of the British colonisers to the resistance of the Sudanese resistance towards the Gezira scheme:

Rather than acknowledging Sudanese resistance, however, colonial discourse represents Sudanese farmers as lazy and incompetent... The refusal of the

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<sup>65</sup> <http://jordanriver.jo/?q=content/jrcep/poverty-pockets-programs> (28th January 2013)



colonizers to officially acknowledge tenant resistance to the imposed (cotton) regime reinforced the British view of Sudanese farmers as incapable of responsibility, and this in turn helped to justify the authoritarian structure of the scheme. (Bernal, 1997:464&466)

Keeping this perspective in mind, it will be interesting to see how the JVA or RSCN adapt their strategies when challenged by opposition in the future.

Even though there is already a large amount of literature written from multiple disciplinary perspectives on rural development, I would still argue for a continuity of research. I have referred (above) to Tania Li and Nicholas Rose to illustrate the point that the notion of community in a political reflection about its conceptual use is not new. Nevertheless representations of people as homogenous communities are still activated in specific realities. These realities are often (artificially) translated into bounded spaces wherein the fantasised communities are supposed to neatly fit. How these target people come to interact with the notion of community and its effects should prove instructive. We can see in Indonesia – as illustrated by Li – or even in Wadi Araba that the community construct has become a tool for political claims from a local perspective.

#### **4.4 Representational spatialisation as an art of government**

*Whilst the term 'community' has long been salient in political thought, it becomes governmental when it is made technical.* (Rose, 2004:175)

Following Foucault's idea of constructed visibility, of 'how spaces were designed to make things seeable, and seeable in a specific way' (Rajchman, 1988:103),<sup>66</sup> a major issue here becomes that of how Wadi Araba might be approached similarly to the way that Foucault analyses structures like prisons, psychiatric institutions, poorhouses and museums. Foucault pays attention both to the purely architectural issues of the physical construction and also to how these spaces provide evidence of the ways in which we see one another and ourselves (Rajchman, 1988:103). He introduced the notion of heterogeneous space to point out that 'we do not live in a kind of void, inside of which we could place individuals and things ... that could be colored with diverse shades of light, we live inside a set of relations that delineates sites which are irreducible to one another and absolutely not super imposable on one

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<sup>66</sup> With reference to M. Foucault, 'The Eye of Power', in C. Gordon, ed. *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon, 1980), pp.146-165.

other'(Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986:23). This reads as common sense, and so he goes further with the idea of 'sites that have the curious property of being in relation with all other sites, but in such a way as to suspect, neutralize, or invert the set of relations that they happen to designate, mirror, or reflect' (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986:24). Foucault terms two of these 'utopias' and 'heterotopias'. It is especially this notion of heterotopias that can view the landscape-community nexus in an interesting perspective.

As opposed to utopias – although Foucault does not completely oppose them – heterotopias comprise sites that are created 'outside' a societal reality. Heterotopias of deviation make this clear: a psychiatric hospital is an example of a structure into which people are placed whose behaviour is defined as deviant in relation to the required or norm (Foucault & Miskowiec, 1986:25). These sites have relations with real space in society, but they are constructed in such a way as to downscale the focus on a single subject and are actually placed in relation to wider structures – which, however, are themselves erased from the picture. We could say that heterotopias are governable spaces in the extreme. Wadi Araba or even Beirut (as a new Dubai) is targeted via development planning to be cleansed of deviation. This is a process quite opposite to the idea of bringing these places and their inhabitants into the 'real world of modernity'. On the contrary, it discards these existing realities from their connections with a broader context. Whatever a place without deviation may be exactly, it is certainly a utopia. This thus becomes a matter of whose fantasy is more legitimate than others, or rather, which is most legitimised by the structures of power.

The way that, living in a shared reality, we create or experience a heterotopia reflects also how we see ourselves and others in relation to this. In returning to the notion of constructed visibility, therefore, among the other senses of environment and political space, that of spatialisation operates as 'one technique in the exercise of power (Rajchman, 1988:104).

Power can become infrastructurally integrated into a landscape without too much notice. Roads, electricity networks, housing and the like are subtle ways of integrating people into power networks. As Foucault remarks, 'power conceals itself by visualizing itself' so '[i]ts outcomes become acceptable because one sees of it only what it lets one see, only what it makes visible' (Foucault, 1990:86). Techniques of power are not just about re-arranging landscape through filling it with a physical spatialisation, but also about making governable spaces wherein, for example, populations are governed. It is at the meeting point of spatialisation and governable spaces where techno-government takes shape. We can see techno-government being applied in development schemes to capture a targeted landscape

and population in a single action. In the case of Wadi Araba, this is not to be understood only in the physical capture of geographical space but also as an expression of the representational: people intimately related to the area through their cultural histories, their movements, residence and subsistence are similarly but 'captured' representational, as if fixed elements of the landscape. It is exactly this rigid designation of people with place and vice versa that is so characteristic of development thinking today. Moreover, these places, these artificially bounded spaces, are not seen as dynamic and related to other sites and people, but as isolated, fundamentally disconnected entities (and which therefore need to be integrated through development into the hegemonic flatscape of modernity)<sup>67</sup>.

Crucially, we have to be aware of the fact that development schemes themselves do not just materialise, they do not come into existence *ex nihilo*. They are manufactured, of course, and behind the schemes there are practitioners working to formulate them. In the format of institutions, practitioners have a power to draw people into their schemes and (re)draw 'communities' accordingly. The 'eye of power' embodied by, for example, the JVA, sees Wadi Araba as an entity of deficiency; hence it creates schemes to dissolve this (Rajchman, 1988:104). It is just these representations of Wadi Araba that establish it as a heterotopia of deviation in structural opposition to (normative) modern society (Whatmore, 2002:13).

Again, an analysis of the Gezira scheme in Sudan is relevant. Here, Victoria Bernal (1997) offers another insight in the power aspects of the development projects in both countries from a Foucauldian point of view:

In Foucault's terms, the Gezira Scheme must be understood as a 'disciplinary institution'. For this and its implications to become clear, however, requires us to decenter the ostensible economic purpose of the scheme and to attend to its cultural qualities, viewing economic interaction as merely one medium through which complex social relations are enacted and negotiated. Recognizing the agricultural project as a disciplinary institution reveals the role of the Gezira Scheme in inscribing colonial social relations, most particularly relations between rulers and ruled (Bernal, 1997:447).<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Andy Hilton introduced me to this concept of hegemonic flatscape of modernity. With this notion he refers to that which does not distinguish or particularise, that what raises the undualities of locality (cleanses it of deviation). I think this notion has interesting potential to underline that the imagination of 'modernity' orders particular places and its inhabitants in as more or less modern, and hence more power to the ones pointed out as more modern. This ordering is arbitrary and cleanse indeed all existing variation out.

<sup>68</sup> With reference to M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979), p. 139.

In the projects of institutions like the Jordan River Foundation, 'the people' and 'the community' are centred in their representations as that which needs to (be) develop(ed) and at the same time portrayed as themselves key actors for the change of their situation. Nevertheless, a (intentional?) gap between the target group and the development practitioners continues to exist. Just as Bernal placed the colonial scheme for Gezira in a broader frame of discipline, thinking in governmental(ity) terms about the development schemes for the Wadi Araba makes its implications more visible and thus clarifies understanding.<sup>69</sup>

In the political framing of this representational spatialisation, community is transformed into technique and landscapes likewise are approached in purely technical (primarily economic commodity) terms. Foucault's renowned idea of governmentality, as 'the conduct of conduct', here translated as 'techno-government', is institutionalised in the *badia* area of Wadi Araba. It thus becomes clear how, through the different interventions of development (social, economic and/or political), relations are rearranged between people and the landscape, between people and the development agents, and among the development agents themselves. This is not mere top-down power functionality, but one that operates in multiple directions.<sup>70</sup> The unexpected outcomes of implemented projects are thus to be understood through this dynamic of a representation of people and landscape translated into a development scheme that anticipates (is premised on and dedicated to) a community-defined transformation of people's lives. A development scheme can be a very powerful de-politicising tool to conduct the conduct of the subject of development – and equally as weak in its inability to comprehend the realities it is acting upon.

## 4.5 Conclusion

Representations of people/'community' and landscape that are translated into development schemes are often based on a fantasised nexus of community-landscape. The image of Wadi Araba as a rather empty place that has been ignored by time is projected simultaneously onto the inhabitants of Wadi Araba who are in turn constructed as a single, undifferentiated unit, considered (as if) a community. Van Aken expresses the point thus:

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<sup>69</sup> Governmental in the way that Rose states (above), which is in line with Foucault's notion (below).

<sup>70</sup> Similarly, Nicolas Rose states that 'governable spaces are not fabricated counter to experience; they make new kinds of experience possible, produce new modes of perception, invest percepts with affects, with dangers and opportunities, with saliences and attractions' (Rose, 2004:32).

The ways of representing this place by development engenders a set of discourses and images that had a major impact in the patterns of understanding the inhabitants of this area: the definition of the place, in terms of representation, has been in fact the medium to define local communities. (Van Aken. 2005:165)

The simplicity of visual imagery obscures the social and historic relations of the valley transcending it in a natural scene. This way of 'looking at' the Jordan Valley is a way of imagining a community rooted in a place, in fact an 'imagined community' through an imagined landscape. (Van Aken, 2005:165)

The representation of Wadi Araba and inhabitants is also composed as a snapshot, inviting comparisons (again) with the static representations of colonial ethnographies. By divesting Wadi Araba of all its political and social dimensions present and active in and beyond its geographical borders, development planning becomes a technical procedure for a technical problem. In these plans, people and the landscape are projected as objects of development (Mitchell T., 2002). As an archaeologist himself, Piotr Bienkowski is very honest and critical in describing the approach of archaeologists towards archaeological sites, such as in Wadi Araba. The standard approach within Levantine archaeology involves, he explains, is that of

...relating environment and resources to demographic patterns, territoriality and social organization, and producing neat, two-dimensional maps which encapsulate and bound our understanding of this past landscape. (Bienkowski, 2006:16)<sup>71</sup>

Such a mode of investigation, Bienkowski continues,

...privileges the visual and the 'viewpoint' of the archaeologist as a notionally objective observer and interpreter. Information and analyses in this format are meaningful to us as archaeologists precisely because it is 'rational', it can be measured and verified, and this something we value above all other considerations as professional 'scientists' and 'academics'. It is obvious that such an approach has nothing to do with how landscape was experienced by those living in it: it tells us nothing about landscapes as relational webs of meaning and material. (Bienkowski, 2006:16)

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<sup>71</sup> With reference Tilley C (1994), *A Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths and Monuments*, London: Berg

However, constructed fantasies of Wadi Araba and its inhabitants do tell us a lot about those who construct the fantasies. Wadi Araba and especially the local people are separated from and indeed placed in structural opposition to the development planners. Insights into the relations between landscape, people and power have become ever more important for a better understanding of the impact of development schemes. When Wadi Araba is analysed from a Foucauldian perspective as a place of constructed visibility, the different power relations come into focus. For example, the relations between the different actors are constantly challenged during project planning and implementation. This 'constructed visibility' is not merely about the physical space – in this case Wadi Araba – but also about the people related to this space. The fact that Wadi Araba has the features of a undeveloped place par excellence, where the people themselves are perceived as incapable of taking the initiative for improvement, appears to offer 'an aesthetic alibi' (Mitchell W.J.T., 2000:198) for external intervention.

The Bedouin population of Jordan has been targeted for transformation schemes since the beginning of the creation of the modern state of Jordan, their nomadic lifestyle in particular appearing as an obstacle to full integration in the modern society – or, and more pertinently perhaps, the very claim of that society to modernity with such a deviation in its midst.

Wadi Araba as home for some of the southern *badia* inhabitants seemed to be a godforsaken place further marginalised by its position on the border with a rival in Israel. With the peace treaty in 1994 opening Wadi Araba to initiatives for a better future, the vision for a Valley of Opportunities came again to the foreground and has since remained always present, a latent potential. Today several development agencies provided with surveys, images and good intentions are trying to find roots there to work towards the blooming valley ideal, but Wadi Araba is certainly not envisioned as a new part of the Promised Land, as has been the case for Palestine and the Jordan Valley as a whole.

More lyrically, W.J.T. Mitchell opines that 'the empty landscape, the waste or wilderness or void, is an iconoclastic icon; it throws down the high places and smashes the traces of indigenous or aboriginal dwelling' (Mitchell W.J.T., 2000:210-211). This certainly counts for the general depiction of Wadi Araba. Ironically in relation to the Bienkowski's critique on archaeological methods, it is precisely the archaeological research in Wadi Araba, which proves that the area has always been linked to activities and people in the wider area. W.J.T. Mitchell's phrasing may be rather dramatic, but it does effectively highlight the erasing of (the

recognition of) people's presence. Against this, though, it is very difficult now for development actors to ignore people. This is certainly partly due to the specific context of the uprisings in the region that have offered a space for resistance. More fundamentally and more widely, however, it is grounded in the fantasised ideas about communities and their landscape that cause agents to run into problems and find their projects blocked and drying up, or else unfolding in unexpected directions steered by the local target group.

The final chapter will illustrate again how the distinction between nature-culture is applied to intervene with a technological intervention that is presented as a-political project that can contribute to solve and prevent political problems. The next chapter looks deeper into the arena of power between landscape and community that was earlier described, illustrated by an analysis of nature conservation initiatives related to Wadi Araba.

## **V. The ambivalence of local knowledge: Strategies of intervention in Wadi Araba, Jordan<sup>72</sup>**

'RSCN believes that conservation and economic development can go hand-in-hand, seeing the potential in Jordan's nature to provide an alternative economy for members of poor rural communities that currently have few opportunities to improve their livelihoods.'  
(Webpage Wild Jordan)

### **5.1 Participatory development**

When framing a development intervention these days, one cannot but talk about participation, partnership and local knowledge. Since the mid-1980s, participatory approaches to development have gradually transformed from a marginal perspective to the mainstream of development thinking. On a policy level where it has shaped donor conditionalities, government and organizational strategies as well as project rationales (Hickey and Mohan, 2005). The participatory turn came as a corollary of growing frustrations with top-down and technocratic approaches to development. Subsequently, a search emerged for ways to let marginalised people, who nominally constitute the targets of development initiatives, gain a voice in the development businesses. The objective was to incorporate those 'voices' into programme or project planning. According to participatory development logic, building on people's articulated knowledge, needs and preferences in planning and implementation would make development a more inclusive and more successful endeavour.

Although advocates of participatory development such as Robert Chambers (1997) initially imagined participatory techniques like the participatory rural appraisal (PRA) to completely reverse hierarchies of program planning and implementation, the mainstreaming of those approaches into the operations of development agencies like the World Bank has raised many questions about such optimistic scenarios. After twenty years of 'including the locals', critics have pointed out that participation often merely serves as a vague signifier, obscuring more than it reveals, and analysed numerous shortcomings of participatory approaches (Cooke and Kothari, 2001; Harrison, 2002; Korf, 2010; Mosse, 2005). The most problematic aspect, and at the same time most relevant for this chapter, is that taking the operation of participatory development for granted actually neglects complex settings of power relations,

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<sup>72</sup> This chapter is based on a co-authored (unpublished) paper with Katharina Lenner.



where actors in very different social, economic and political positions encounter each other (Büscher, 2010; Harrison, 2000; Mohan and Stokke, 2000).

This chapter explores the complex setting of Wadi Araba in the current tradition of participatory development. Among various strategies of intervention with more or less participatory components, the main focus lies on the recent attempt to establish new protected areas under more participatory conditions than before. The outright rejection of this attempt by a vocal part of the originally envisaged partners forms the basis for a critical reflection about the relation between participation, the relevance of local knowledge, and politics.

The overall argument in this chapter is that development and conservation are Janus-faced when it comes to local people and the incorporation of their knowledge. On the one hand, the current suggestions for participatory conservation and development show the limitations and contradictions of such an approach. Only a specific kind of local knowledge can be productively integrated in a field shaped by previous and simultaneous interventions, the rationales and objectives of the implementing agencies. Neither can the wider political context in which projects are embedded be neglected. On the other hand, the participatory framework can still serve as a basis for appropriation and re-politicisation of development by those who are addressed as 'partners'. Pointing out the contradictions of participatory approaches can have a significant mobilizing impact. The outcomes of such forms of participation- resistance if you will- however, can diverge significantly from what planners have in mind; it is not necessarily productive and hard to be channelled back into preconceived participatory methodologies. In sum, whereas the 'local knowledge' identified by intervention agencies - whether through participatory methods or not - is often merely a corollary of predefined intervention objectives, there are also forms of local knowledge which disrupt those preconceived forms. This 'other' form of knowledge though does not stand outside of the dynamics of intervention and improvement efforts, but is intimately connected to them.

First, Wadi Araba is introduced as a laboratory of development, subject to different, often competing interventions, and focus on two agencies; the aforesaid JRF and the (JVA). Both operate with very different procedures regarding the place of 'local people'. Tracing their operations will show that project implementation does not always follow a standardised model. How and to what degree inhabitants are included in such schemes is as much subject to different approaches (participatory or not) as to the exigencies of implementation and the necessity to compromise. Subsequently, we trace the twists and turns of conservation and

development thinking in Jordan by looking at the strategic development of the RSCN, and explore the role accorded to local people in this process. Two issues stand out as bases for the current unwillingness of local inhabitants to comply with the participatory methods RSCN is offering to them. One is the cautious and contradictory participatory turn of the organisation; the second is a deep-seated limitation in truly conceiving local populations as knowledgeable 'partners in conservation'. Directing the focus on the conflicts around the establishment of protected areas in Wadi Araba, we argue in conclusion that participatory approaches such as RSCN have led to an opposing dynamic of 'project fatigue versus people fatigue', which, for the time being, has brought these initiatives to a standstill.

## **5.2 Multiple Wadi Araba**

By now I think it has become already more clear that Wadi Araba has evolved as an ambiguous place through history. Forming the border to Israel, security measurements in Wadi Araba have had a notable impact on social relations. This concerns, for example, the status of land ownership. Private land ownership is not very common (Palmer et al., 2007:52), which enables the government to keep a degree of control over the border area. The security regime also has an impact on 'outsiders'. As a researcher from the capital Amman, but even more so from outside Jordan or the Arab World, you are easily detected on the radar. Officials are also less accessible than in Amman due to 'security reasons'.

A second representation of Wadi Araba is that of a marginal place. In spite of established ways of life and usages of space by its inhabitants, who mostly identify as Bedouins, farmers and /or pastoralists, the area is, according to the current land use plan, 'designated for future studies' (Chesrown, 2004), whatever this might mean. The JVA, the regulatory authority charged with land distribution and infrastructural development in Wadi Araba, has worked its way down from north to south since the 1977. Wadi Araba, the most Southern part of the Jordan Rift Valley, was only reached in 2001 and is still not entirely covered; land distribution and infrastructural provision efforts are ongoing. At the same time, Wadi Araba has become increasingly interesting for development projects of different types, and recent years have witnessed a mushrooming of developmental agencies, programs and projects, pushing forward different agendas of development. This is particularly the case since 2007, when the Jordanian King visited Wadi Araba and issued the order that there should be a comprehensive strategy for the development of the Wadi (Jordan Times, 5/4/2007). This initiated a trail of development: it led to the creation of a 'Wadi Araba Development Unit' and the proliferation of strategy documents and different initiatives. It has done a lot to turn Wadi Araba from a blind spot to a hotspot.

Both the high poverty rates and the low population numbers seem to have developed quite an appeal for development practitioners – after all, you cannot do much harm in a place as desolate as this one. One reflection of this, which we have repeatedly heard from local inhabitants as well as organisations active in Wadi Araba, is the impression that the area has turned into a laboratory for different injections of development. The head of one such major organisation quoted a wide-spread sentiment as *ihna haql tajaarub* [we are a testing ground] (Personal communication JRF, Aqaba, 2011). This is connected to another very characteristic feature of the area, which is the vague regulation of authority and the frequent shifting of responsibilities, accompanied by disruptions in planning and implementation: the Wadi Araba Development Unit for example, a unit supposed to develop and implement a comprehensive development strategy / Master Plan for the area, was shifted around between three different agencies since its initiation in 2007. One corollary of this regulatory blurriness is that you have a great variety of agencies pursuing different initiatives, but without really cooperating or coordinating between them.

### **5.3 Blueprint vs. process development: two sides of the same coin?**

When it comes to the kind of knowledge considered relevant for development in Wadi Araba, two differing approaches can be discerned at first sight: Blue prints for large-scale infrastructural, environmental or business development are provided by experts positioned in the capital Amman or in transnational/global networks of expertise. In those, the area tends to be imagined as an empty space, local inhabitants are at best included in the planning as (indirect) beneficiaries and are supposed to adapt their livelihoods accordingly. One striking example of this would be the planners involved in the design of a water conveyor linking the Read and the Dead Sea<sup>73</sup>, thereby helping to save the constantly shrinking Dead Sea and at the same time providing water for the inhabitants of Amman. When asking about consultation of the inhabitants in the planning process, one of the project representatives told us that ‘They will be happy, because they will get economic and social benefits. This does not mean that we will ask them if they agree’ (Personal communication MWI, Amman, 2009). On the other hand, the area is also subject to development projects with participatory components. In such strategies, local knowledge and participation are perceived as basic ingredient of a successful development dish. When looking at specific organizations or projects, however, there are many shades of grey. A brief look at two of those organisations and their projects can illustrate how and why different development agencies in Wadi Araba relate to the

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<sup>73</sup> The proposed conveyor is further elaborated in the last chapter.

question of local knowledge and its integration into their systems of operation. The organisations/institutions JRF and JVA are mentioned above. Their programs are in this part of importance because their approach on knowledge of how to manage environment, land or farmers.

### *5.3.1 Jordan Valley Authority*

The first example is the 'Wadi Araba project', which – as already mentioned in previous chapter - has been under the management of the (governmental) JVA and/or Aqaba Special ASEZA, the regulatory body in charge of the Special Economic Zone of Aqaba, bordering on Wadi Araba to the South. JVA was formally responsible for development of Wadi Araba since the 1970s but ASEZA was actually put in charge of most components of this major project between 2009 and 2011 - a corollary of the already mentioned blurriness of authority, as well as the previous relative neglect of the area, and the sudden rise of interest after 2007. By now, responsibility has been switched back to JVA.

When talking to JVA or ASEZA representatives about the input of the inhabitants of the area in the project, you can notice an ambiguous discourse. On the one hand their procedures represent a techno-political approach, which reflects the infrastructural, trickle-down focus of the 50s, 60s and 80s: Any problem or need comes with a clear-cut and straightforward scientific or technological solution in line with their plans and schemes. A typical response to questions about cooperation with locals was that 'this is about engineering; working with a standard model' (Personal communication, Aqaba, 2010). Plots for the model farms are decided on the basis of examining soil samples in the lab and classifying them; alternative suggestions and different rationales (like tribal land claims, or the experience of flooding in a designated area) fall on deaf ears if there is no adequate scientific proof according to their methodology. As a JVA project manager made clear, adapting the project to people's wishes will cost money and time, so they should just stop complaining and be grateful for what they get (Personal communication, Wadi Araba, 2011).

But there is another side to the Janus face. Towards inquisitive outsiders like us, but also in interaction with local people involved, project managers would present themselves as responsive and inclusive - caring about job creation, even distribution of benefits, and seeking to react to any articulated needs of the locals. This does not go as far as systematically inquiring about any of those needs *before* the start of the project; it is much more ad-hoc and after the fact. It is, however, based on an idea of projects only being successful with some kind of local buy-in at some point. When JVA faced strong complaints

about the uneven distribution of guard jobs (for the agricultural stations set up in the course of the project) between the local *'asha'ir* for example, they subsequently decided to increase their number in order to secure a more even distribution and avoid more conflicts (personal communication, Wadi Araba, 2011) In the practice of project implementation, compromises are thus being struck, and some locals do get some kind of say (Li, 1999). But most of all, it seems to be about setting yourself off against other agencies by appearing 'more in tune with the locals', even if it is against the other agency working on the very same project. Questioning the sincerity and success of other agencies during field visits to local beneficiaries (or in conversation with visiting researchers) is an important part of this game.

### *5.3.2 Jordan River Foundation*

At the other end of the continuum stands the aforementioned Jordan River Foundation. As a Royal NGO, it provides an interesting example of an organisation whose interventions are nominally based on the philosophy of participation. It can thus stand in for the participatory turn that has become so prominent on a global scale since the 1990s, which has also increasingly seeped into Jordanian development organizations. In line with the non-governmental sector spearheading this approach on a global scale, it has especially been picked up by the Jordanian Royal NGOs. Reasons for this might range from improved access to donor funding to changed organizational philosophies, or a mix of those.

The presence of JRF in Wadi Araba since 2002 has greatly expanded since their involvement in Poverty Pockets Program in the last few years. While working under the national umbrella of poverty alleviation, the overall goal of JRF as an organisation is to empower, build capacities and create partnerships in and with local communities. The Foundation's doctrine of participatory development becomes visible in statements like 'Do not make promises you can't fulfil' or 'They (i.e. locals) have to see you as their representative' (Personal communication, Aqaba JRF September 2011). In project development and implementation, their focus lies on cooperation with charitable or cooperative societies (engaging in agricultural or tourist activities). JRF perceives these organisations as the perfect candidates for empowerment - local structures that are already there, showing some kind of entrepreneurial spirit or community responsibility, and ready to be empowered. Their interventions in Wadi Araba and elsewhere are based on what people ask and what is feasible for the Foundation. The know-how they bring into the process seems, at first sight, to concentrate on getting a process of knowledge-building and local engagement going.

While most of their cooperation partners in Wadi Araba confirm and commend their 'people-centred orientation' (Cleaver, 2001:36), the question remains how this approach is translated in practical turns into the socio-political reality of Wadi Araba. It is in this translation that we can find fissures on the ground. An example, which the Foundation perceives as a 'success story', is the agricultural cooperative in Risha. JRF helped to establish the cooperative, built a dam for irrigation, offered (separate) work opportunities for women in the cooperative and established an agricultural project. But there is also another side to the story. A cooperative as recipient of substantial donor funding also shapes power relations on the ground. The Risha cooperative's president has not changed once since its inception ten years ago; people who cannot afford to buy a share of the cooperative cannot become members, and women are excluded from membership.<sup>74</sup> The idea of cooperatives as equal partners is to be encouraged in theory, but in practice often results in a perpetuation of power relations within the cooperative or the locale of intervention itself. This is, of course, not unique to Wadi Araba's or Jordan's cooperatives, but relates to local institution-building and attempts for decentralisation in other parts of the world as well. More often than not, they reify rather than alter local power relations (Al-Husban, 2005; Cleaver, 2001; Mosse, 2005:81ff.). Another question was raised in the context of participatory approaches like JRF's is about the actual effectiveness of such interventions: who from among the local inhabitants actually benefits, and do they serve the professed goal of poverty alleviation? (Harrison, 2002). Project beneficiaries have evaluated JRF and its (and others) previous interventions of the last nine years in Wadi Araba positively, but the poverty rate still went up in the last years (cp. DOS, 2010). Apparently, working with cooperatives and local government does not a priori mean that this will improve the lives of the 'really poor'.

So – participation to what end? And where are the concurrent limits to the participatory methodology? One limitation is certainly set by the organization's overall orientation in the development business of Jordan. A program manager in the JRF headquarters for example - when describing the integrated approach JRF was following - stressed the need to start activities awareness at the schools, even if this was not requested by local communities. This was because JRF felt the need to start with youth, in order to change their minds towards becoming more business-minded.<sup>75</sup> The long-term goal of instilling a sense of entrepreneurship (instead of having people continue demanding government and army jobs) seems to entitle project managers to go around articulated needs or add to them according to their own philosophy. The organisation's ideas for what is feasible and in line with the needs of the area thus structures the type of activities offered by field staff and affects the

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<sup>74</sup> Interview with inhabitant of Risha Wadi Araba, Apr. 2011

<sup>75</sup> Interview with JRF manager; Amman, Apr. 2011

strategies of those locals who get involved. Potential project beneficiaries tend to learn fast about the kind of participation and needs articulation that can be realistically answered by a specific agency or project and adapt accordingly (Mosse, 2001; 2005).

Looking at the broader context of JRF's position within the political landscape of Jordan, its participatory focus also sheds lights on another objective. Recent years, especially the last one, have witnessed an increasing amount of informal talk, but also of public criticism of JRF as the brainchild of Queen Rania. The Queen herself, a controversial figure particularly for many inhabitants of Southern rural Jordan has been accused of strengthening the neoliberal trend in Jordanian politics, interfering in executive decision-making without formal authority, squandering public money and 'building centers to boost her power and serve her interest against the will of Jordanians and Hashemites', as a well-known statement of 36 tribal leaders in February 2010 read (Bouziane & Lenner, 2011:158). JRF has thus come under increasing scrutiny within Jordan. Stressing its participatory credentials can thus be regarded as a strategy to counter a crisis of legitimacy by demonstrating care for its beneficiaries. One of the cooperative heads in Wadi Araba confirmed this by saying that people were angry with the JRF, but that it made successful efforts to improve their services recently (Personal communication, Wadi Araba, 2010). At the same time, the participatory framing of operations has become a question of upward legitimation (Mosse, 2001:27ff.), showing that JRF is (still) worthy of receiving a large part of the funds earmarked for cooperation of the Jordanian government with Jordanian NGOs.

Reviewing those two initiatives in Wadi Araba and their respective approaches regarding local knowledge shows that even though they markedly differ in their approach towards local beneficiaries, they do not neatly follow either the blueprint or the processual approach. Especially the mixture of participatory and technocratic approaches points to the fact that the integration of people, their ideas and demands does not always happen according to a standardised model, but also on an ad-hoc basis. It is as much based on a specific approach (which might or might not include an explicit participatory methodology) as on the attempt to set themselves apart vis-à-vis other, seemingly competing agencies in the field, and thereby to defend their *raison d'être* in the struggle for funding, support and maintenance of institutional coherence. (Mosse, 2004)

## **5.4 Twists and turns of conservation and development in Jordan**

The incorporation of participation and local knowledge in project descriptions is not restricted to the more 'typical' (infrastructural, culture and economic) development-oriented programs or projects. Of course, development as a meta-discourse does not have a clear boundary - as such it can't be separated from other types of intervention. These days almost all governmental, NGO or PPP (private public partnership) initiatives taken in Wadi Araba - from the construction of roads to the shifting of administrative boundaries - come under the header of development. One such initiative, which currently forms one of the major strategies for developing the area, is nature conservation. This form of intervention will constitute the focus of the remainder of the chapter.

As authors like Birkenholtz (2007:466) point out, the conflict between expertise and local knowledge in relation to nature conservation is central to the question of development. Since their inception in the late 19th century, conservation policies have been based on the assumption that 'pristine' nature - uninhabited and physically separate from humans - needs to be conserved for the benefit of mankind. This has tended to exclude those who happened to inhabit those particular areas. It has provided an occasion not only for evicting and relocating them, but has also placed them outside the realm of legitimate knowledge about nature conservation (West et al., 2006: 256).

The increase of nature conservation initiatives in the course of the previous century and their increasing connection with questions of development, however, went along with a reorientation of the place of people in these initiatives. Chatty and Colchester (2002) indicate a shift in the assumption that human activities cause degradation of the biological environment - a deeply entrenched assumption of conservationists for decades - to an awareness for the need to involve local people in the implementation of conservation initiatives. In ideal terms this would mean that nature conservation is given a 'human face' (Bell, 1987, cit. in Chatty and Colchester 2002:9). A quick look at existing literature on the (limited degree of) inclusion of local inhabitants into programmes of nature conservation suggests though that the 'human face' is still far from reach, or at least questionable in its current state (Belsky, 1999; Brechin et al., 2003; Colchester, 2003; Pimbert and Pretty, 2009).

As an example for these often very ambivalent processes, we now focus on the conflicts around the set-up and management of protected areas in Wadi Araba. By reconstructing and deconstructing the discourse and praxis of conservation of the Royal Society for the



Conservation of Nature (RSCN), we want to open up space to explore the actual role and place of local inhabitants in conservation and development. What role is envisaged for them in the conceptions of conservation planners, and how do those supposed to be included adopt or - in this case - rebuff this conception?

#### *5.4.1 The Royal Society for the Conservation of Nature*

RSCN was established in 1966. As in other cases, the idea of protecting nature in Jordan came into being in order to preserve hunting grounds for the elites. Gradually, the organisation adopted the role of conservation agency, focusing its work on Protected Areas. Since 1973, RSCN is in charge of managing all protected areas in the country (Chatelard, 2012: 7-8).

Global paradigmatic shifts regarding nature conservation, the development of new techniques as well as institutional learning processes have left their mark on Jordanian conservation thinking. In the course of its institutional development, the place RSCN has given to local inhabitants in or around its reserves has undergone significant changes.

While the period between the 1970s and 1990s was dominated by the idea that protected areas need to be fenced and policed in order to prevent human intrusions, the early 1990s witnessed a major change. This was connected to the development push in global conservation thinking. It came in parallel with the 'greening of aid' and the increasing prominence of the concept of 'sustainable development' since the late 1980s, which promised to unite conservation and development objectives under one banner. (Hicks, 2008). By the 1990s, this new thinking arrived in Jordan, and RSCN subsequently redirected itself towards development by piloting the approach of 'Integrated Conservation and Development' in the Middle East. The occasion for this shift was provided by a major project funded by the World Bank's and UNDP's jointly established Global Environment Facility (GEF). In its course, a protected area in the South of Jordan called Dana reserve, part of which is located in Wadi Araba, was initiated as a pilot project for a new way of managing conservation and has been serving as a blueprint for other reserves until today (Johnson, 2007).

The new philosophy was directed towards managing instead of fencing off protected areas. Conservation was supposed to be made beneficial for local communities by addressing their social and economic needs, and by offering them economic alternatives to their otherwise 'harmful' practices (such as hunting, wood cutting, and grazing of livestock). The most common alternatives established through the project are employment in the reserve

(e.g. as ranger), ecotourism activities (e.g. as guide), and so-called 'socio-economic projects' (mostly handicrafts). While providing local inhabitants with economic benefits, ecotourism and socio-economic projects were simultaneously supposed to and also succeeded in funding a substantial part of RSCN operations. The search for new financial resources for RSCN (in the absence of major government funding), helped by an extensive infusion of international expertise, has turned RSCN into a highly market-oriented organisation. This, in turn, has made it an organisation that is sought after by the donor community because it is perceived as accountable, transparent and highly visible, particularly through its ecotourism projects<sup>76</sup> (Chatelard, 2012).

Local knowledge and participation were, however, not a big issue in this approach. Community involvement was equated with providing employment and benefits, and not regarded as a base for the further development of conservation approaches.<sup>77</sup> Cooperation happened individually, with certain key figures in the area, but not in a grounded structural way.

Over time, Dana has always been used as test case for new initiatives. These ranged from changes in engagement with inhabitants inside or close to the reserves to management issues. Some compromises with local inhabitants were struck; for example in developing a seasonal grazing scheme, which came as a reaction to community pressure for opening up parts of the Protected Area for grazing, or a goat-fattening project in Wadi Araba. The latter, focusing on the core livelihood strategy of local pastoralists, constituted a significant, albeit only temporary deviation from the standard approach of developing alternative livelihood options in order to ease grazing pressures (Johnson and Abul Hawa, 1999; Rowe, 2006). But experiments also went in a different direction, with the recent concession of an eco-lodge (in Wadi Araba) to a private investor, who now runs the lodge and provides the RSCN with an annual fixed return. In this highly acclaimed pilot project, management as well as tourism development are outsourced to the private sector due to its supposed superior knowledge about these issues. In monetary terms, this strategy has paid off; visitors' numbers, financial returns and also salaries of local staff have significantly increased; the outcome in terms of 'ownership' is, however, much more ambivalent. 'Local knowledge' has not played any significant role in this effort to improve the efficiency of RSCN's tourism endeavours; in fact it has been sidelined through the focus on handing over management of tourism facilities to

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<sup>76</sup> Personal communication, Amman, April 2011

<sup>77</sup> This was not by default, but was the outcome of strategic considerations. At the time it seemed to project representatives that without providing economic benefits in the first place, local people, often impoverished and neglected by government authorities for decades, would not buy in to the idea of conservation.

outside experts (Personal communication, Wadi Araba, 2010). People's participation is again reduced to employment of locals in and around the eco-lodge, albeit under more insecure working conditions than before.

#### *5.4.2 The last resort?*

Conforming to the turn of the tides in global conservation thinking and based on some lessons learned from established protected areas like Dana, RSCN has also put new models of conservation on the table, which give attention to more participatory ways of conservation and development. On certain aspects, it has thus moved further away from classical models of '*fortress conservation*' (Corson, 2010:581. With a new round of GEF funding, the RSCN is currently piloting a model called Integrated Ecosystem Management' (IEM). Next to the more participatory establishment of protected areas in consultation with local communities, it introduces the concept of 'Special Conservation Areas' (SCAs). Corresponding to global conservationist emphasis on incorporating sustainably utilised environments into the system of protected areas, SCAs are regarded as a type of conservation site that is locally managed and promotes more sustainable forms of natural resource use (Zimmerer, 2006). Based on the confidence that these tools will make development more participatory, more empowering, and more collaborative (Korf, 2010:714), Social Assessments (SAs) and site-specific Participatory Rural Appraisals (PRAs) will precede the further development of this new model. Additionally, the management of both protected areas and special conservation areas is supposed to happen in cooperation with Local Co-management Committees, Community Based Organizations and representatives (World Bank, 2006). It should be stressed though that this approach has not become the new standard operating procedure of RSCN; it is a pilot model that has been added to the existing repertoire of protected areas management. The Dana approach of Integrated Conservation and Development with its focus on socio-economic benefits also still lingers in the background as a model to replicate.

The limited degree to which such a perspective has taken hold in the organisation can be seen in a parallel strategic revision, which is still ongoing. Since around 2008 RSCN, encouraged by an external consultancy, is starting to realise that it has overstretched its capacities. Especially in relation to local inhabitants, there is a feeling that the organisation cannot stand up to the expectations of being a provider of employment, services and other benefits. Contrasting the estimated number of inhabitants directly affected in their livelihoods by the establishment of protected areas with the limited resources of RSCN has led to the realisation that community involvement needs to be seriously reconsidered. The overall idea of the envisaged institutional transformation is to redirect RSCN from the role of a provider to

that of a facilitator. As such, it is supposed to represent the respective communities and their unresolved problems, for example by developing and presenting reports about the state of the community to responsible government agencies. While details of how exactly this should work are yet to be fleshed out, the idea so far represents an attempt to deflect demands for social provision, let alone compensation for the loss of livelihood options, to the government and thereby reduce RSCN's role to its original mandate as a 'pure' conservation agency again. Moreover, the 'transformation strategy' so far seems to be based on a relatively unproblematic notion that RSCN, due to its long-term experience in the respective localities, can gauge communities' needs and adequately (re-)present them to the outside world. Besides general questions about the bases on and ways in which their needs would be assessed, the recent admission of RSCN managers that its relations with local communities in some places have faltered or even broken down, makes it hard to imagine an unproblematic switch of roles towards acting as a 'facilitator'.<sup>78</sup> In addition, it remains an open question whether or how the role switch would be linked to its pilot attempt to integrate local voices into conservation planning and administration.

In summary, the last 20 years of strategic development reveal three different approaches to the question of local knowledge and participation: In Integrated Conservation and Development, locals primarily appear as beneficiaries; there is little use of their knowledge, and the establishment of Protected Areas doesn't depend on them. In Integrated Ecosystem Management, locals are an essential part of the process from the start, and their knowledge is to be included for conservation to succeed. In the Transformation Strategy, locals feature as marginalised communities that need lobbying for them, but cannot be satisfied with RSCNs limited resources for distribution, so RSCN better stops trying and turn into a facilitator for their needs. While this development on the one hand represents a gradual rethinking and strategic shift, the three approaches are on the other hand still equally valid and informing practices of protected area management and establishment. High-level managerial staff also frequently switches between them, depending on the context, audience, or project.

In spite of those strategic changes, there is one aspect in the relation between RSCN and the local inhabitants that has stayed remarkably constant over time. Since its establishment, RSCN's operations have been based on the assumption that local practices constitute a threat to the conservation of biodiversity in and around (potential) protected areas. These practices are considered an important cause of environmental degradation. In the area we are focusing on, RSCN refers especially to the effects on the environment through grazing of

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<sup>78</sup> Powerpoint presentation of RSCN manager, April 2010

livestock and hunting by local inhabitants. The idea of an incompatibility between conservation and pastoral land use, which up to the 1990s still reflected contemporary conservation thinking, has withstood shifts in the latter since then and still dominates the thinking of senior RSCN management (Rowe, 2007:770). This becomes visible, for example, in a paper about desert tourism, which reiterates the familiar narrative of deficiency when discussing the role of the population of Wadi Araba that lives close to Dana Reserve:

Several thousand people from nomadic and settled communities live in and around the Reserve, many of whom are partially or entirely dependent on the reserve for their livelihood. Their use of the reserve, however, is causing serious ecological problems, stemming from excessive livestock grazing, hunting and fuel wood collection. These activities had little detrimental impact in the past, when tribal populations were smaller and Bedouins could practice their nomadic lifestyles without issues of national borders, settlement policies and major infrastructure developments. But now the pressure of these traditional livelihoods is concentrated in the last remaining areas of unspoiled landscape and is the major threat to their ecological integrity. (Johnson, 2007:3)

The assumed causal relation between local practices of resource use and the degradation of nature has thus firmly remained in place. As the above quote illustrates, it is based on the premise of pastoral ecosystems as stable equilibrium, which become threatened by overstocking and overgrazing - an assumption which has been strongly questioned since the beginning of the 1990s (Chatty, 2003:91). International conventions by now stress the contribution of 'mobile indigenous peoples' to sustainable resource use. The 2002 'Dana Declaration on Mobile Peoples and Conservation' for example, hosted and supported by the RSCN and a network of researchers, politicians, International Governmental Organisation (IGOs) and INGOs International Non-Governmental Organisation (INGOs), holds that 'through their traditional resource use practices and culture-based respect for nature, many mobile peoples are still making a significant contribution to the maintenance of the earth's ecosystems, species and genetic diversity and explicitly recognises "mobile peoples" rights, management responsibilities and capacities' (Refugee Studies Center et al. 2002). Such a perspective, however, is hardly reflected in RSCN strategies and institutional practices to date.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> An exception to this is the IEM strategic document. Rather than local practices of resource use, this document points to development interventions as main environmental and cultural threat to the area of the Jordan Rift Valley. (World Bank, 2006:1)

As we will point out in the remainder of this chapter, the basic assumption of locals as predators of nature and the invalidation of their knowledge and ways of life is felt by the 'objects of intervention', and forms a base for their resistance. In addition, they pick up on the contradictions of the different presented strategic approaches, which are all currently in use within RSCN, and all also applied to Wadi Araba. This inconsistent use of strategies has caused significant frictions on the ground in Wadi Araba, which we now turn to.

### **5.5 Project fatigue vs. People fatigue: Frictions in Wadi Araba**

Besides agricultural development and megaprojects like the already mentioned Red-Dead canal, conservation cum (eco-)tourism is currently perceived as one of the best paths to the development of the Wadi Araba. Many planners and practitioners agreed upon this new strategy for the area, which makes RSCN a crucial actor in the area. Looking at RSCN's current role in Wadi Araba, it is possible to see its institutional evolution, and at the same time the contradictions and struggles associated to it.

The area currently contains one established protected area (Dana, since 1994), two protected areas that are yet to be established (Qatar, Jabal Mas'ouda), plus one Special Conservation Area (Rahma). Dana, still seen as the blueprint, works according to the 'Integrated Conservation and Development Model', i.e. the philosophy of 'making it pay' (Irani & Johnson, 1998), with little involvement of inhabitants. The new proposed protected areas and the Special Conservation Area come under the framework of the current GEF project. Based on the new philosophy, they are supposed to be established in a more participatory mode. While the proposed new conservation sites were initially met with friendly curiosity by involved inhabitants, the last two years have seen the development of staunch resistance against any kind of involvement of RSCN in the area.

A number of different issues have led to the recent cancellation or freezing of all of the new initiatives. The reasons for this are disputed, and raise the question of the relevance of local knowledge. Most of the opposing arguments do not fit neatly with the language of participation and its problematiques, but rather with one of resistance. As we will illustrate though, resistance does not imply that there is an untainted 'indigenous' subject endowed with a knowledge that stems from a time and space 'beyond' development interventions such as RSCN's. Rather, it is shaped by current as well as previous interventions and builds on their contradictions, gaps, broken promises or diagnoses of deficiency, which are re-appropriated and strategically used (Li, 2007; Olivier de Sardan, 2005). In this case, the

resistance to any new form of nature conservation in the area of Wadi Araba is intricately connected to the cautious and ambiguous participatory turn of RSCN.

This intertwinement becomes apparent, for example, when tracing the cancellation of the proposed protected areas of Jabal Mas'ouda and Qatar. There are some ambiguities in reconstructing how the cancellation of the proposed protected area of Jabal Mas'ouda came about: At RSCN, the main reasoning you will hear is that Jabal Mas'ouda was part of the old suggested network of protected areas but that a new ecological survey revealed such a high level of degradation that RSCN decided to leave it and switch to another area.<sup>80</sup> There is some acknowledgement of the fact that there were conflicts (with the adjacent Petra Regional Authority, as well as with local people, who wanted to use that land for agriculture, and are waiting for a recognition of collective or individual land claims), but those are not considered as the main underlying reason. On the other hand, accounts by different agencies (e.g. JVA) as well as those of local people focus much more on the aspect of rejection by the prospected future inhabitants of the area, and point to agencies other than RSCN as responsible for the cancellation<sup>81,82</sup> Whereas RSCN thus gives conservationist expertise as reason for cancellation, most others refer to local opposition. It is of course not unique for this particular area that conservationists' expertise is pitted against local opposition. Similar issues are at play when looking at the freezing of operations in the second proposed protected area (Atyyat, 2011; Namrouqa, 2011) and have occurred in other cases as well (Brechtin et al., 2003; Li, 2007).

Rather than engaging in a futile search for who is actually wrong or right, it seems more fruitful to explore what the stories told to us about the cancellations or freezing of the different areas in Wadi Araba can reveal about the relation between the different versions and actors. Of particular interest for this chapter is how the idea of participation, present in almost any development initiative proposal, plays out with regard to the proposed conservation areas. While there are influential factors that go well beyond RSCN and its past and present role in Wadi Araba, the current dynamics coalesce around the 'offer' of participatory conservation and development it has put on the table.

We would argue that the baseline for implementing their initiatives is an implicit technocratic one, aiming to solve predefined problems: 'Not enough nature is protected? Let's establish more protected areas. People are not happy with this prospect? Let's do it with more

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<sup>80</sup> Interview with RSCN manager, Sept. 2011

<sup>81</sup> Informal talk with RSCN and JVA project representatives, Sept. 2011

<sup>82</sup> Interviews with local representatives and inhabitants of Risha, April and Sept. 2011

participation'. Reacting to complication from such a solution-oriented perspective is to silence any political dimension related to the projects. At the same time, the adoption of a participative framework represents an attempt to be more attentive to local needs and concerns. The intertwining of these seemingly paradoxical objectives is not surprising, as organisations like RSCN have to be accountable towards their mission as well as their donors and at the same time find root in the field. But this ambivalence can create a lot of friction on the ground, where they are supposed to root. While others (e.g. JVA and JRF) seem to do fine so far, RSCN has become subject to resistance. One could summarise the different ongoing dynamics as 'project fatigue vs. people fatigue'.

### *5.5.1 Project fatigue*

On the 'project fatigue' side, people have been listening to the same talk of participation, partnership and local benefits and answered the same questionnaires about needs for years, but they have not seen their situation improve noticeably. Now they are claiming what has been promised to them for years; not necessarily and exclusively by RSCN, but by the variety of competing agencies, each posing as people-oriented in their own way. Local objection to projects has too often been invalidated as ignorance, local stories or myths and has rarely been taken serious as based on knowledge and experience. Although most new project proposals describe local people as partners and an inclusion of their knowledge as an important prerequisite for the success of projects, people themselves do not feel like they are really treated as such.

Asked about the basic problems with RSCN, one of our interlocutors in Wadi Araba for example stated: "The problem is that they come with the attitude that people know nothing, they think that people are primitive, and they want to develop them into modern people".<sup>83</sup>

Based on this impression, they are now confronting the participatory rhetoric head-on and exposing its limits, and RSCN provides a rewarding occasion.

Although the perspective described in this quote tends to imagine people in Wadi Araba as living at the end of the world, they are connected with each other in the region and beyond. They exchange information and integrate this into their own strategic choices. In particular, people have gained knowledge by observing RSCN and its projects over the last decades. A lot is based on perception, and as information about established protected areas and previous experiences with RSCN gets spread over the country - through delegations, family

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<sup>83</sup> Personal communication Wadi Araba/Rahme, 2011



connections and rumours - perceptions get sharpened and suspicions rise. What is often conceived as 'local' or 'indigenous' knowledge thus presents itself in a way which differs from the cherished conceptions of development planners: it is not spatially confined and fixed, but shaped through interaction with the outside world.

The simultaneity of approaches within RSCN, which was explored in the previous chapter, is irrelevant to people; it rather serves to undermine the credibility of the current 'pilot participatory approach'. For locals, RSCN is RSCN. When you ask about the refusal to cooperate with RSCN regarding the new conservation sites, people will refer to the concession of the eco-lodge in the adjacent Dana reserve to the private sector. This transfer is perceived as proof that RSCN cannot be serious about local management of protected areas and tourism. They also stress that RSCN takes the huge majority of the funding for them anyway, and not for developing the area of concern. If they were serious, why did they not give the lodge to the local community to manage? (Interview with cooperative member in Rahma, Sept 2011) What makes sense to RSCN managers in Amman as an institutional evolution is taken by locals as reason for suspicion.

Institutions of development tend to have difficulty imagining the effect of their own operations. As Timothy Mitchell reminds us, 'international development has a special need to overlook this internal involvement in the places and problems it analyses, and presents itself instead as an external intelligence that stands outside the object it describes' (Mitchell T., 2002:210-11). Our analysis shows that it's not due to an inherent logic of development discourse that the consequences of RSCN's own contributions to local conflicts are neglected. Rather, one can pinpoint specific institutional and processual exigencies, like the need to think about the generation of revenues, which is prioritised over the question of the effects in the respective localities. This prioritisation is not unchallenged though; it is subject to questions and critique even by some at RSCN who are more connected to 'the field'.

The project fatigue is also related to the fact that core issues and demands of local people are left unaddressed in the participatory framework. As mentioned before, development initiatives tend to have a depoliticising effect in their efforts of social improvement (Ferguson, 1994; Li, 2007; Mitchell T., 2002). Factors external to a specific project scope, such as climatic aspects, modes of state intervention and regulation, or previous or simultaneous development actions can significantly determine the reaction of local populations to an incoming project. But it is exactly those local histories of socio-economic and political interventions that tend to be neglected and silenced in the project logic (Olivier de Sardan, 2005:139). We argue that it is through this erasing that the causes of friction are not

recognised. This most prominently concerns the issue of land. Land claims, which are a crucial part of local demands these days, are either ignored (JVA) or placed outside the scope of the project (RSCN). This is not surprising, as they are connected to much more powerful interests and agencies (among them the Jordanian government as well as the Royal Court), which even RSCN does not have very good access to. For that reason it is also rather irrational for people to concede land for conservation to RSCN, which implies giving up any claims the local inhabitants might have on it. The current situation, inspired by Arab uprisings elsewhere, puts those land issues very much on the table and makes people voice their unrecognised land claims more loudly.

### *5.5.2 Local knowledge in flux*

When analyzing resistance to the protected areas in Wadi Araba, it becomes clear that local knowledge is neither timeless nor homogenous. We should not romanticise Wadi Araba prior to the entrance of 'development agents'. Much like other supposedly remote rural places, Wadi Araba has long been a connected place, where knowledge has been influenced and shaped by different outside forces and previous interventions seeking to 'improve' the respective populations. As such, it is neither clearly local (as in: locally bounded), nor would it be appropriate to label it 'indigenous', with all its concomitant associations as being 'unincorporated, resistant, incommensurable, originary, authentic, or simply, an alternative' (Gupta, 1998:180).

Local people are not isolated from the world outside, and are also well aware of how to use their knowledge and connections. This could be illustrated with an example related to land: While land registration in Wadi Araba was quasi non-existent before independence, these days people are very keen to register and have private ownership.<sup>84</sup> This limited access to private land is an important reason for refusing RSCN interventions. Local people, particularly those with access to land and resources, are as much aware of the value of land today as any other actor interested in the area.

Also with regard to land use, there is no unchangeable, locally confined knowledge. Instead, land use practices of inhabitants need to be historically and contextually situated (Schareika, 1997:19). With regard to agriculture as a way of land use, Jordan has always been pushing its limits of becoming the 'bread basket' of the greater region. Whereas the northern valley constituted the agricultural focus point from the establishment of the Kingdom, today also the

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<sup>84</sup> In other parts of Jordan, inhabitants would voluntarily register already under the Ottomans for different socio-economic or political reasons. The willingness to have land officially registered - and thus pay taxes - differed significantly from place to place. (Fischbach, 2000)

southern part, Wadi Araba, has come into the green picture. There certainly exists an agricultural knowledge based on social interaction and engagement with the land in the area. But knowledge and practices of land use are as much shaped by the "politics of agricultural operations" (Gupta, 1998:181). Within these politics, the different practices of local agricultural knowledge are constantly adapted to the setting offered by the changing and competing agencies intervening in the area, and therefore subject to change. They are shaped by forces such as prices for saplings, the type of traders or merchants they have access to, government approval for the usage of wells, and many other factors.

Local knowledge also does not only constitute a base for resistance, but also for alternative strategies and alliances. In relation to RSCN, personal employment or benefit, as well as the conviction that the protected area is in fact a good idea, have been mentioned as motivations for supporting them (Interviews with inhabitants of Risha, Sept 2011). Those who do not approve the presence of RSCN in the area also create alliances with other agencies active in Wadi Araba (such as JRF, JVA or the governor of the province).

To conclude, all the different orientations are part of a heterogeneous set of dispositions that constitute knowledge and inform practices and strategies of local inhabitants (Gupta, 1998:183). At the same time, various types of knowledge and practices are concealed from an outside perspective like ours, or that of development agencies. The articulations of knowledge used with or against RSCN (or development projects in general) come from specific individuals. They mostly tend to stem from local elites, rarely from women, poor people and other marginalised groups who are nominally the main target group of development (Mosse, 2005:81ff). The silencing of the latter voices does not happen coincidentally in processes of project implementation as well as in a context of contestation.

### *5.5.3 People fatigue*

On the other side of the equation, you can find an increasing 'people fatigue'. Obviously the local knowledge/critique coming out of the consultations and negotiations of the last months does not correspond to what the planners had in mind when designing a new participatory approach to conservation. The outcome is too unruly, too fundamental and too political to be contained by participatory tools like PRAs and co-management committees, or to be productively included in the project. This has led to internal discussions about the usefulness of participatory approaches.

At the moment, you could distil three different reactions to this impasse, which roughly correspond to the three different strategies outlined in the second part. A small minority of RSCN staff thinks that the local opposition has a point. They still see the need to include locals in the management of any new protected area in recognition of their rights, and advocate an entirely new formula of sharing of benefits. They are not finding much sympathy among decision-makers within RSCN though. Other voices, more significant in number, overtly or implicitly opt for withdrawal from participation mode. Frustrated with the lack of local enthusiasm about the opportunities offered, they fall back on the national mandate of RSCN as to legitimate operations in the last instance. Reacting to our remark that there is a lot of opposition to the establishment of protected areas in Wadi Araba, one senior manager commented:

'It is like this all over the world, it's the story of conservation. In this regard Jordan is quite advanced. It's a matter of two different viewpoints regarding the value of the site; they are conflicting. The communities do not want to have any negative elements from out of the area, but the nation has the right to conserve and protect biodiversity'.<sup>85</sup>

Here the old conservationist mantra of having superior knowledge reasserts itself - but it doesn't by itself provide an answer to the question about alternative ways to deal with local communities. The third reaction, and the one that attempts such an answer, comes from those voices (particularly in the senior management of RSCN) who see the way out of the 'community trouble' in the idea of RSCN as facilitator. The facilitator's role implies that RSCN goes back to the essence of its mandate - nature conservation - and helps out inhabitants only in a mediating manner. In this way RSCN dissociates itself from the local expectation of being a provider. To mediate, one needs to be able to address the concerns that came to the surface together with the refusal of the new proposed protected areas, but RSCN has not really accomplished that.

As a conclusion to the intricacies of participation and local knowledge on both sides of the equation, we can state that in the case of RSCN's operations in Wadi Araba, participation has failed to serve as a referent, which can unite the interests of multiple stakeholders. In other cases, the 'banner of participation' has not necessarily solved underlying conflicts, but made it possible to establish and carry out projects. Like 'empowerment' or 'poverty alleviation', it constitutes a label, which is sufficiently vague to provide room for interpretation and translation between different interests. It is exactly this vagueness, which brings in the

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<sup>85</sup> Interview with RSCN management Sept. 2011

possibility to build temporary alliances around it. In successful cases, vague referents like this can contribute to establishing a relative coherence of development interventions (Mosse and Lewis, 2006). In our case, however, previous experiences, obvious contradictions and conflicts of interests have precluded the emergence of this relative stability. The empty signifier of participation has not succeeded to provide a sufficiently large amount of imagined coherence; it has proven to be too contentious and resulted in 'project fatigue vs. people fatigue'.

## **5.6 Conclusion: The Frankenstein of participatory development**

The turns taken in development thinking in the last few decades have brought us today to a critical point. Not only do (social) scientists raise questions about the notion 'participation', but so do the so-called 'target groups'.

With this chapter we zoomed in on the remote area of Wadi Araba to illustrate some of the contradictions that lay base for frictions between the RSCN and local inhabitants. In the evolution of RSCN, one can easily detect the parallel evolution of the global environment governance agents (e.g. the World Bank). RSCN has to twist and turn its policies and project implementations to stand up to the expectations from donors and local inhabitants. By adopting the participatory approach to get a stake in the area - where they have to compete with several other development agents - RSCN has put itself in a very complex position. Several provocations for this situation have been pointed out in the chapter. Mainly the double standard that is applied by RSCN - but again not exclusively by RSCN - towards people and their knowledge has led to a significant distrust between both parties. RSCN has overstretched its capacity as development agent by making empty promises to people who have been promised so much, but only have seen little happening. Without romanticising 'the locals', people have learned over the past decades how development agents work and how to deal with them. Also the opposite happened; RSCN doesn't know anymore how to deal with people. This is what we called in the end; a people fatigue.

There is actually one crucial thing RSCN particularly has failed; it has neglected all the time that like any development intervention, conservation projects are deeply political forms of intervention. With every intervention in the area, where there is already an existing political reality – or even several realities if you want - new forms of conflict arise around control of land, resources etc. As a strategy as many others, RSCN reaches out to the participatory toolbox, hoping that a PRA will smooth up sensitive issues. Notwithstanding its efforts, we

can witness an attempt of people in Wadi Araba to re-politicise social relations through for example refusing cooperation to the efforts for more participatory conservation.

The participatory turn of RSCN, which has been very ambivalent and limited, has created its own Frankenstein. Over time this way of operating with people has turned its ugly head towards RSCN.

Similar to other container concepts in current development and conservation discourse, such as 'indigenouness', 'empowerment' or '(local) community', the notion of 'participation' could provide an entry point for advancing political projects of disempowered groups. Only until today not rarely these concepts run counter to their actual objectives (cf. Gupta 1998, Olivier de Sardan 2005:144ff.), in the case of RSCN: *Helping Nature, Helping People*.

But the field of participatory approaches in development is wide. 'Participation' inside development approaches, as Hickey and Mohan (2005) illustrate, is not a fixed notion. It has been subjected to different interpretations and thus bears the potential to be repoliticised. The resistance that came to the fore in Wadi Araba could open doors for a different, broader and more political understanding of participation. It could actually be regarded as engagement, not as withdrawal. If RSCN wants to adopt a new role as facilitator under these conditions, 'faciliation' can only be based on allowing social and political conflicts to enter the frame. But this would mean having to engage with uncomfortable issues that are often rather suppressed: the legacy of decades of blueprint development for example, as well as broader issues affecting the 'governance beyond the center'.

Much like development interventions overall, conservation projects are a deeply political form of intervention which produce new forms of conflict centered on control of land, resources, etc. (Duffy, 2006) At the same time, they attempt to defuse such conflicts, for example by including schemes from the toolkit of participatory development, such as PRAs. The case we have looked at in Wadi Araba demonstrates that such depoliticisations are not always successful. More interesting is that we can witness an attempt to repoliticise social relations in Wadi Araba through refusing cooperation with efforts at (more) participatory conservation.

To conclude, we can say that when local knowledge is not articulated according to plan, it is made invisible or bent to suit planning requirements rather than used as a base for rethinking strategies of intervention. However, as ambivalent and limited as the participatory turn of RSCN and others may be - it has created a Frankenstein; i.e. it has developed a life of its own and rears its ugly head now. Much like other concepts in current development and

conservation discourse, such as 'indigenusness', 'empowerment' or '(local) community', the notion of 'participation' can thus provide an entry point for advancing political projects of disempowered groups, which more often than not run counter to the actual objectives of a project (cf. Gupta 1998, Olivier de Sardan 2005:144ff.) So the 'participation approach' as adapted by RSCN now goes against RSCN itself and blocks the business as usual.

The following chapter will approach Wadi Araba as a landscape formed by human and non-human elements. This approach enables to understand why the implementation of a nature reserve causes friction as it starts from the dichotomy nature-culture in its project planning.

## **VI. Techno-politics in concrete: The Red Sea Dead Sea water conveyor**

Since ancient times the Dead Sea has been a centrepiece to the history and development of three cultural and religious traditions. The Dead Sea and its unique environment are changing. The water level has been dropping at an alarming rate for decades. If no urgent action is taken to remedy the situation, the decline is likely to cause severe environmental damage. (TOR World Bank, 2005)

### **6.1 Ceci n'est pas une pipe**

In 2005, the governments of Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Authority<sup>86</sup> announced an enquiry into a new potential megaproject with potential benefits for the three parties. This project is a water conveyor that would run from the Red Sea to the Dead Sea. The outcome derived from the implementation of the conveyor was presented as a win-win situation for three reasons. First, it will salvage the shrinking Dead Sea. Second, it will desalinate the water and generate energy that will be distributed to the three parties. Lastly, the conveyor will symbolise cooperation and peace in the region (World Bank, October 2010).

At first sight, the proposed conveyor seems to be a classical example of a grand scale development project. In the Terms of Reference, a comparison is drawn to similar projects in the world with regard to their magnitude (World Bank, October 2010). This is certainly not a unique enterprise. The idea of building the Red Sea Dead Sea water conveyor has had a wide range of predecessors with the same objectives<sup>87</sup>. Water related concerns in Jordan have been on the national and international agendas since early 1900s. Different designs have been produced but then cancelled, revised or put on hold. Today, the scarcity of water in Jordan is a high priority and, more than ever, it is connected to the rapid increase in the population (by birth or migration<sup>88</sup>).

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<sup>86</sup> Although in international terms the areas of the West Bank and Gaza are referred to as the Occupied Palestinian Territory (OPT), previous studies have generally referred to them as the Palestinian Authority (PA). Furthermore, the general naming of the three initiators of this project has been an issue. Israel did not want to have to recognize the OPT/PA as a fully autonomous (national) entity.

<sup>87</sup> In the further outline of this chapter, I will also refer to this conveyor as the Red-Dead Conveyor

<sup>88</sup> Recently the influx of Syrian refugees is heavily emphasized in the media. Similar trend as in 2003 when Iraqis migrated to Jordan.



As stated, the reports published by the World Bank alone indicate that the Red Sea Dead Sea water conveyor is an enormous construction, but, as all other gigantic water projects in the world, it is a necessity.

The aim of this final chapter is not to deny the actual problems with water in Jordan and more specifically with the Dead Sea, nor is it a question of being in favour of or against the Red-Dead project. In this part of my dissertation, I will argue that in the realm of mega infrastructure projects, one can question the a-political cover wrapped around the conveyor. The connection between expertise, infrastructure, development and power has also been made before. Authors such as Ribeiro (1994), Mitchell T. (2002), Van Aken (2003) and Kaika (2006) analysed rather similar case studies. They examined projects which have been implemented and whose impact can be empirically observed. The new proposed water conveyor in the south of Jordan has not been implemented, and it is doubtful if this will change. Therefore, this chapter actually concerns a future case study. Nevertheless, it is a case study that has already been a subject of research. Specifically, technical analyses have been done on this future project or similar projects that have never been carried out (Scott et al., 2003; Abu Qdais, 2002, 2008; Gavrieli et al., 2005; Murakami & Wolf, 1995).

The idea to study the water conveyor emerged three years ago. In those three years, not only did the project take different turns and shapes; my approach for analysing this case study also changed. It sometimes seemed like it was almost too complex or useless to frame it in the existing literature. By keeping an eye on the progression of the project for three years, the meaning of the conveyor project did not become crystal clear, but it made me realise that this project is an example par excellence of current 'progressive' thinking. Progressive is not to be understood in a radical political and emancipatory way, but rather in teleological terms.

Since the project has yet to be implemented, there are no empirical facts and effects resulting from its construction. Hence, the main part of the chapter will be based on the published (pre-)studies of the conveyor and interviews with informants who are part of the different study groups and representatives. Nevertheless, the most neglected, but from my perspective most interesting, aspect of the case study is the effects of the mere idea of developing a mega-project on the ground, i.e. in the social reality of Wadi Araba (and beyond).

The image of Jordan as the backyard of the old greater Syria or the buffer zone of the Ottoman Empire has been one that the current rulers of the state prefer to counter with the

image of modern nation-state. However, Jordan ranks fourth concerning water scarcity and at the same time Jordan has absorbed several great refugee influx what increased the pressure on the available water supply. Images that Jordan describe have been very influential, with regard to the water conveyor the picture strongly emphasises strongly the connection between geography and demography. Timothy Mitchell describes in the case for the Nile delta in Egypt a similar image that focuses on the river, the packed population living on the riverbanks, the surrounding desert to analyse the delta 'in terms of the tangible limits of nature, physical space, and human reproduction' (Mitchell T., 2002:210). Within the description of the Nile delta or Jordan as obstructed by natural boundaries, answers for solutions to overcome those boundaries are 'a more scientific management of resources, and new technologies' (Mitchell T., 2002:210). As Mitchell also concludes, the solutions (i.e. the Aswan Dam or the Red Sea Dead Sea water conveyor) are not merely about management and technology, but also about the social and politics.

In the attempt to approach the water conveyor from a techno-political angle, I hope to avoid the traps of a single technocratic management discussion and succeed to illustrate the interconnections of such powerful notions as necessity, global development and opportunity. As the last chapter of this dissertation it illustrates how Jordan (or more concrete the ruling actors) is continuously working on the form the Hashemite kingdom should take. In the vision of Huntington Jordan will need values as thrift, investment, education, organisation and discipline to enhance human and economic progress. One could say that a multi billion water project is quite an embodiment of those values.

## **6.2 Historical context**

Water projects are never just about the provision of water. Jordan's past and future water projects are no exception to it. The international, or rather transboundary, water initiatives involving Jordan have been mainly within the framework of regional peace or the settlement of Palestinian refugees/nomadic populations. The existing literature on these matters is rather diverse; it ranges from a technological approach with a focus on, for example, the possibility of dams or desalination, to a more governmental, mostly one-sided, perspective (who benefits more or less), to a political one where the focus is on geopolitics. Especially regarding the Middle East, one can find an abundance of literature on the issue of water and conflict. All kinds of sources, academic and especially semi-scientific sources, refer to the possibility of water wars between and inside the countries of the region. 'The next wars will be about water' is a threatening message.

The area that is now known as Jordan was populated long before it entered the geo-political scope, and people had to fend for themselves to obtain water. In the early years of the

twentieth century, although it was still under Ottoman rule, there was little Ottoman interest in Jordan. Predominantly foreign actors have been interested in the 'potential' of the Jordan Valley (Khoury, 1981). A canal running parallel to the Jordan River was envisioned for (Palestinian) agricultural and energy purposes as early as 1910, but was never implemented. This is one of the ideas that would re-emerge in the 1960s in the shape of the East Ghor Canal (later re-named the King Abdullah I Canal). During the Mandate period, the regional water sources, such as the Jordan River, were centralised as the water and energy sources for Palestine<sup>89</sup>.

As the British reaped geo-political benefits by having control over important regional water sources, the United States found similar ways to maintain a presence in the area as part of their containment policy towards the Soviet Union (Elmusa, 1994:37). Probably the best known plan for the settlement of water disputes is the Johnston Plan (1955) - named after American mediator Eric Johnston - between Israel, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon. The plan itself was based on previous studies, which were conducted in turn to examine the possibility of settling Jewish settlers/colonisers in the Jordan Valley. The Johnston plan—shifting focus to options for settling Palestinian refugees—was rejected by both the Arab and Israeli parties, re-negotiated and in the end not implemented. However, it was perceived by Israel and Jordan as a step towards agreeing separately with the predecessor of the US Agency for International Development for support in the construction of two water conveyors (the Israeli National Water Carrier and the aforementioned East Ghor Canal)<sup>90</sup>. Jordan and Syria continued to negotiate the future Maqarin dam (referred to as the Al Wahda dam) on the Yarmouk River, which would not be completed until 2011.

Jordan has a history of ever changing and some never implemented plans. Implemented or not the water related plans are interesting as they illustrate the equally continuous struggle for the Hashemite Kingdom to position itself in the region and towards its citizens. The purpose of this chapter is to illustrate that projects concerning water never are not isolated plans and projects. Moreover, the design of the Red-Dead water conveyor grew and was proposed especially in the last decades or even century<sup>91</sup>. Alternative water conveyors bringing water from the Mediterranean Sea (also covering the restoration of the Dead Sea) or from Turkey (freshwater) have remained options. The Red-Dead project was presented

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<sup>89</sup> In 1926, the British mandate conceded for 60 years the exclusive use of the waters of the Yarmouk and Jordan Rivers to the Palestine Electric Corporation, called the Rutenberg Concession after the Zionist investor (Mauro Van Aken et. al, 2007:52).

<sup>90</sup> The amount of water that the canal can channel is agreed with the other riparian parties.

<sup>91</sup> In the Zionist imagination, a water conveyor such as the Red-Dead could make the desert bloom and offer a Jewish home.

several times as a real option, for example, at the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg and a year later in Kyoto at the Third World Water Forum. Finally, in 2005, the much-awaited agreement between the three beneficiaries materialised. With reference to Foucault's notion of heterotopias and also Mitchell's citation to the fact that the planners their job requires ' a constant work of imagination, but none of it precedes or stands apart from doing things in reality. There is no other, more real world' (Mitchell T., 2002:45), I think it is important to keep in mind that plans as the Red Dead conveyor are not up in the air but very much connected to reality.

The reality that has been created and keeps on being moulded through time and events are also given shape through a variety of discourses. For a moment I follow Jan Selby (2003), who illustrates that we can distinguish three discourses that are used to explain a water crisis (in his case study, Palestine/Israel) and to offer solutions: an ecological discourse, a technical discourse and a political discourse (Selby,2003:21). Of course the different discourses are never found in a 'pure' form. It is this mixture of discourses that makes a project like the water conveyor and its context all the more interesting. Besides the discursive side, the project carries historical and local implications and has a future international scope. In the next two parts, the necessity and global view will be addressed.

### **6.3 Needs discourses and the politics of necessity**

The mega-scheme is considered Jordan's first step towards addressing its water crisis, while the strategic Red Sea-Dead Sea Water Conveyance Project will be the country's radical and permanent solution to its water problems. (Jordan Times, 25/05/2013)

We can all imagine that nobody wants to deprive people of water, nobody wants a historical world heritage to disappear and everybody wants world peace. If we think of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan as one of the most water-scarce countries in the world, sharing the Dead Sea can be a symbol of the cradle of human culture and civilisation (World Bank, TOR 2007). As a neighbouring country of Syria, Iraq and Israel/Palestine, Jordan remains a safe haven in the midst of conflict areas. Additionally, the proposed water conveyor would be able to bring extra potable water for municipalities, conserve an important symbol of history and contribute to regional peace. If it only takes a technological intervention to secure all of this, then what is the problem?

When one goes the website of the Jordanian Ministry of Water and Irrigation, there is a message from a prominent figure about the water scarcity which Jordan is facing.

The water shortage has become of a permanent nature, meeting water demand is a challenge, and managing water resources is imperative. (Secretary General Sa'ad Bakri, mwi November 2009)

Our water situation forms a strategic challenge that cannot be ignored. We have to balance between drinking water needs and industrial and irrigation water requirements. Drinking water remains the most essential. (H.M. King Abdullah II, mwi May 2013)<sup>92</sup>

The numbers also illustrate that Jordan is facing a water shortage. According to Jordan's Water Strategy 2008–2020, only 145 m<sup>3</sup> per year is available per capita (estimated in 2008). By comparison, the water poverty line has been established at 500m<sup>3</sup>. In general terms, Jordan had, according to the same strategic plan, a water deficit of 565 MCM in 2007. After spending 11 months in Jordan, I quickly realised how precious water is, when the water tank on the roof was empty and the weekly refill was still a few days away. It was also possible to see that the Dead Sea is indeed losing its water at an average of one meter per year.<sup>93</sup> As the pressure on available water sources will only increase, it is not surprising that the notion of a water crisis has become central to the measurements developed by the government to push forward certain projects (i.e. Red Sea Dead Sea Water Conveyance).

The descriptions of and justifications for the Red-Dead project illuminate the cause of and solutions to the three discourses that Jan Selby mentions in relation to this project. The ecological discourse points at the scarcity of water due to overpopulation, the technical discourse relates to the inefficiency of water use (i.e. agriculture) and the political discourse relates to the unequal distribution of water (i.e. too much water for agriculture, too little for households or tourism). The overstretching of the water resources due to overpopulation is mainly explained with the different refugee influxes that Jordan has had to take in. Today, Syrian refugees are, according to officials, causing 'a severe stress on the public water supply and wastewater networks, which now serve double the population in locations like Ramtha and Mafraq' (Jordan Times, 25/5/2013). Fortunately, the Disi Project<sup>94</sup> is almost to

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<sup>92</sup> King Abdullah had already stated this in 1999.

<sup>93</sup> Probably one of the clearest ways to see this reduction is to be in the swimming pool at the Mövenpick on the Dead Sea. This pool was created to give an impression of continuity with the sea, but due to the lowering sea level, this effect has disappeared as well.

<sup>94</sup> The Disi project is another (disputed) conveyor that carries water to Amman from 55 wells dug in the Disi aquifer at the border with Saudi Arabia. Disi is very interesting, as it caused considerable friction in Jordan. Some questions were raised about its implementation: for example, studies showed the possibility of contaminated water; Disi is a fossil aquifer, and once all the water is pumped, the aquifer is empty for good; the amount of money spent, i.e. 1.1 billion USD, could have been used for the restoration of the water pipe system of Amman; it is a Built-Operate-Transfer project managed by a subsidiary (private) company of the Turkish company Gama.

be completed in July 2013 to provide some of the necessary fresh water. The technical view explains it quite clearly: there is a water deficit due to bad water management and an increase in demand, and hence an augmentation in the water supply is necessary. In the same view, water should be differently distributed to a sector such as agriculture, as the balance of water consumption and economic profit is negative.

### *6.3.1 Techno-politics of scarcity*

With respect to the facts on water just touched upon, I continue with a focus on the imagined role of water as a de-politicised source of conflict (Kaika,2003:919). In the same perspective, developing mega projects such as the Red Sea Dead Sea conveyor can prevent such a conflict. Authors such as Maria Kaika (2003) and Samer Alatout (2008) illustrate that a debate on the scarcity of water is mainly conducted in a technocratic frame supported by experts and adopted in political policies regarding water. A technocratic approach to the scarcity implies automatically that there is no space for social, cultural or political relational thinking. Although the World Bank is not (yet) a financial partner in the Red Sea Dead Sea project, it has facilitated the associated studies. The World Bank has learned its lessons from the past, when it was accused of exerting too heavy an economic/financial influence on projects.<sup>95</sup> Parts of the required studies are an environmental and social assessment, the results of public meetings and a study of alternatives. Without being too critical, and keeping an open mind because of the fact that decisions have yet to be taken, it is still necessary to ask questions about the project. Actually, it is especially the sheet containing the questions raised during public meetings that shows that the 'inclusive approach' towards potentially affected people and the environment are just a façade. Any question that hints at any political cause or effect of the conveyor is swept away by the answer that the question is outside the scope of the studies. The most ignored question is related to the Palestinians' right to water. Furthermore, the Palestinians' access to the Dead Sea is blocked due to Israel's occupation of the Jordan River and Dead Sea area of the West Bank. The rescue of the Dead Sea is also seen as an opportunity for the parties to receive intangible benefits. One of the remarks made at a public meeting in 2008 pointed to the fact that it is a very political project in a very political area. The reply to this remark was as follows:

The Study Program is a technical initiative, not a political initiative. Terms of Reference, section 8.2.2, "Intangible Benefits," sets out the technical, not political,

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<sup>95</sup> Michael Goldman offers an impressive amount of literature on the methodology of the World Bank as a development institute (especially with regard to environmental projects).

basis for analysing and quantifying the various intangible benefits of any planned water related infrastructure. (World Bank, 2008)

This creates a paradoxical situation. The technical problem of not having access to the Dead Sea is, in the Palestinian case, a very political problem and will remain so if those political issues are not raised. Furthermore, it is almost cynical to address multi-lateral co-operation as a contribution to the understanding of the underlying causes of the conflict, whereby

cooperation is much more feasible in the concrete than in the abstract; solving practical problems is easier than solving abstract problems and what is learned regarding working together can be translated into other spheres of endeavor. (TOR, 2005)

The general line in the project is to stay as far away as possible from politics (i.e. abstract problem).<sup>96</sup> Even if it is a political problem, the solution has to be formulated in a-political terms. The perception of water as part of nature that can be tamed to ameliorate human culture elucidates what techno-politics is and how it can help for another understanding of the water conveyor:

Techno-politics is always a technical body, an alloy that must emerge from a process of manufacture whose ingredients are both human and nonhuman, both intentional and not, and in which the intentional or the human is always somewhat overrun by the unintended. But it is a particular form of manufacturing, a certain way of organising the amalgam of human and nonhuman, things and ideas, so that the human, the intellectual, the realm of intentions and ideas seems to come first and to control and organise the nonhuman. (Mitchell T., 2002:42-43)

The water conveyor project is often a news item informing about its current state and results from studies. As the project is concerning a reality, it also is confronted with unexpected (scientific) results, change of financial options or people's (sceptical) responds. Those encounters will indeed be overruled with other numbers, the statement that there is no other option, opening space for alternative studies or adaptations to the original version. In its turn this will be reported in the newspapers (or at least in the English versions). Similar processes are observable in the implementation of the conservation projects. Twist and turns will be

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<sup>96</sup> Recently a Jordan Times article also titled 'Red-Dead project should be implemented away from politics' (Jordan Times, March 18 2013)

made and sometimes projects will not be executed but this will be a calculated adaptation of cancellation.

### 6.3.2 *Water as fluid friction*

Mega water projects are often connected to the idea of general progress (i.e. modernisation).<sup>97</sup> I already stated that control over water resources is not just technical, but has other social and political implications. The most well illustrated fact is that water and land are very well interconnected, especially when it comes to having access to both. For the construction of dams<sup>98</sup>, villages often have to disappear or people are resettled. However, it does not have to be so dramatic to be a serious issue. Jordan experienced the effects from acting in a pure technocratic way when implementing the development scheme for the Jordan Valley, where water and the redistribution of land caused a social movement and rearrangements (e.g. wiping out existing water management, relation to land etc. but also the flexibility to change). (Van Aken 2003) The construction of the East Ghor Canal—to provide the necessary water—triggered land redistributions. Although it was done on the basis of the idea of breaking down the ownership of big landlords and allocating land to the smaller farmer, this created a whole land market, where the big landlords found ways to keep their property as it was.<sup>99</sup>

The notion of tribal land is a sensitive issue in Jordan because it is not (for everybody) recognised as a key to accessing land. The roots of some of the tribes of Wadi Araba can be traced outside the current Jordanian borders, and some only came rather ‘recently’ to the area. Apart from the Azazme<sup>100</sup> tribe, most of them seem to have found their place and recognise each other’s borders. Of course, conflicts happen, especially when land is officially appointed to some and not others. The (tribal) land claims have posed constant issues, but have been laughed away many times by related institutions, such as the JVA. The neglect of the importance of access to land and the frustrations related to access to land are reflected in the perception of the project by ‘the potentially affected communities’.

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<sup>97</sup> See, for example, Maria Kaika (2006) ‘Dams as Symbols of Modernization’ or Erik Swyngedouw (1999) ‘Modernity and Hybridity’.

<sup>98</sup> The Three Gorges dam in China is probably the most extreme case.

<sup>99</sup> See Michael Fischbach (2000) ‘State, Society and Land in Jordan’, Mauro Van Aken (2003) ‘Facing Home. Palestinian Belonging in the Valley of Doubt’ and Sharif Elmusa (1994) ‘A Harvest of Technology: The Super-Green Revolution in the Jordan Valley’.

<sup>100</sup> The tribe of Azazme ‘originated’ in Palestine/Israel and came to Jordan in the late 1960s. Other tribes have very clearly declared that Azazme are not from Wadi Araba, although where other tribes are allegedly from is much less spoken about. Especially between Rashayda and Azazme, there are difficult relations. The Rashayda had to move towards New Feynan village to make space for the protected area, although the Azazme were able to stay in the Wadi Feynan close to the Eco-lodge that had been built there.



The World Bank matrices of the public meetings include the denial of a future development plan for Wadi Araba that is directly connected to the conveyor. In theory, this means that little will happen to the land of Wadi Araba after the construction.<sup>101</sup> I would argue that it makes the planning and the future implementation of the conveyor all the more interesting. I have mentioned it several times in this thesis; due to the 2005 agreement with regard to the conveyor project, land has been frozen in Wadi Araba.<sup>102</sup> Already in its planning phase, the conveyor has had effects and has caused friction on the ground. In the Karak Ghor area, people asked to stop the freezing of the land as long as the project had not yet started. In Karak, people asked to use the land in the meantime for agriculture (Ammon News, 27/2/2012). The rationale that we received when questioning the freezing of the land years before the implementation was that if people could buy land that will be later part of the project zone, the government would have to buy it back. 'People know the value of land' followed the explanation. It is true that people are very well aware that the desert has economic value. People are equally aware of the value of water and the economic profit that it could bring, whether it is environmentally sustainable or not. However, what they are seeing or hearing is that water will be pumped in a pipeline under the ground to Amman. Similar processes were implemented in the Jordan Valley. The statement in 'Historical trajectory of a river basin in the Middle East: The Lower Jordan River Basin (in Jordan)' that 'as a high awareness amongst the farmers that scarcity is not just a natural fact, but a political fact', is very recognisable in the case of Wadi Araba (Van Aken et al., 2007:105). As mentioned before, the fact that water is not abundant in Jordan is not a point of discussion, but the allocation of the water is.<sup>103</sup> The perception of the uneven allocation of water heavily influences the social relations between people. Just standing at the side of the Dead Sea highway south at any point in Wadi Araba and looking to the west, one can see the literal green oasis in Israel. The aquifer under Wadi Araba is used to provide Israel the water it needs, due to the 1994 peace agreement (for a moment, the wells were Israeli while they occupied part of the area). Now, the water will be pumped up to Amman. This undeniably sharpens the relations between the people of Wadi Araba and those in the capital.<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> In the early stages of the planning, there were references to possible small and major scale economic opportunities that might result from the conveyor, mainly at the open canal part (Initial Assessment Report, March 2010:158).

<sup>102</sup> While conducting the research, it did not become much clearer to me how the situation was before 2005. The inhabitants who had received houses from a settlement program also received land, but this (and the house) could not be sold either at all or not until a certain number of years had passed. I understood that before the land in Wadi Araba was governable land or belonged to JVA, there was no entitlement to individuals or tribes unless they could prove differently with an official paper of registration. However, this remains an interpretation/question.

<sup>103</sup> What Van Aken might call 'the political reality of water scarcity' (Van Aken et al., 2007:121)

<sup>104</sup> From the King Abdullah Canal, water was transferred to Amman, where many previous emigrants returned after the first Gulf War (Van Aken et al., 2007:70). It generated the discussion about the

## 6.4 The Jordanian water loop

In the case of the Jordan Valley, the construction of the East Ghor Canal contributed to an 'abundance' of water that created optimism for progress in the Valley. By taming the water, the Valley could 'bloom'. As Jordan is now in a situation of scarcity, new interventions are required. Whether it is about abundance or scarcity, the common assumption is that the human or culture can and should have control over the non-human or nature. Swyngedouw insists that we recognise that nature and society are deeply intertwined (Swyngedouw, 1999:43). This rupture of culture–nature was addressed in previous sections, but it is also definitely part of the technocratic approach to the water scarcity situation in Jordan. The kind of relationship that people have with water, or the impact that water projects have on the existing relations, is rarely taken into consideration during the planning phase of such projects. In the early assessment of the proposed water conveyor, there were references to the concerns and hope that the local people expressed during the first meetings. It seems that in the last stages of the planning, there is little awareness about these concerns. The conveyor studies did include a social assessment panel based partly on qualitative research. Besides the meetings in the city of Aqaba, researchers with surveys and project presentations have visited some of the Wadi Araba villages. They have adapted the technology according to the level of 'modernity' of the audience. In Wadi Araba, they have used flip charts, although elsewhere (for example during visits in Israel), they have employed PowerPoint presentations supported by technical equipment. This is a small issue, but quite symbolic in terms of how the audience has been perceived. Furthermore, questionnaires have been administered, and they have left many questions, hopes and doubts behind. The visits served mainly to satisfy the criterion of participation.

For the inhabitants in Wadi Araba, water is always a concern. Among the people who inhabit fixed settlements, almost everybody is connected to water, although we can question the quality of that water (I was told that it has a high salt content which affects the pipelines). Having access to water for irrigation is only possible via the existing cooperatives.<sup>105</sup> Also for the people asking for water it is not only an issue of water but it is at the same time strongly related to have access to land. The land is still not formally recognised as tribal land, and out of interviews chances are small it ever will.

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urban and agricultural water needs. Similar discussions concern the rise when water from the Red Sea will pass by Wadi Araba to flow to Amman.

<sup>105</sup> With the support of the Jordan River Foundation, the construction of a dam was fully completed in 2004 at Kaa' Al-Saedine, which the nearby villages and especially the cooperative next to the dam can make use of.

As mentioned above and mainly in the introduction, also in the case of the water conveyor there is a clear distinction made between human-nature. The distinction is not just water versus conveyor, but is extended to related issues as land. All particles that actually consists the water conveyor's idea and implementation are divided in the two categories and placed opposite each other. Bruno Latour indicates this distinction and the idea to overrule nature by cultures (human) as a typically western worldview to place itself into modernity. Actually the west has enjoyed so far the privileged access to nature that it is actually not to be perceived as a culture (Latour, 2002: 9).

The idea of brining water to people is also a way for a central government to position itself towards its citizens. In the consulted literature with case studies on Greece, Israel and Spain, authors refer interestingly to how the provision of water in terms of abundance helped to shape the national identity in the formation of the mentioned states. It is no coincidence that the aforementioned countries initiated major water projects in moments of political 'crisis' or transition (Alatout, 2008; Kaika, 2003, 2006; Swyngedouw, 1999). In the case of Jordan, we notice a similar movement, but also how the changing strategies for state formation are reflected in the water projects. The development of the Jordan Valley is the best example of the politics of water intertwining with the political formation and position of Jordan in the region. After the influxes<sup>106</sup> of refugees in the Jordan Valley, the central government represented by the Jordan Valley Commission (JVC)<sup>107</sup> initiated the first integrated development plan 1973–1975. Without going too deep into the Valley, this plan encountered many delays and adaptations. Only in 1978, as the first phase was accomplished, could the people experience the changes. Or, in the very subtle words of Rami Khouri, 'The residents of the Valley, traditionally the most backward segment of the Jordanian population, suddenly faced new opportunities' (Khouri, 1981: 163). A more important remark that Khouri makes is 'that the JVC or JVA was in charge now of every aspect of life of the inhabitants of the Jordan Valley. They decided how and where to use the land, housing or other facilities' (Khouri, 1981: 161). With the JVC in charge of facilitating, the government had the idea to break down the strong tribal powers in the area. The situation today is fascinating, as we can notice a mixture of historical trends. On one hand, the Red Sea Dead Sea Water Conveyance represents a very contemporary international institutional vision for development. The central governments are obviously key players, but they are surrounded by (international) experts conducting different studies and dispensing advice. Of course, the global development institution the World Bank has taken on the role of 'watch dog' and will

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<sup>106</sup> After the influx of Palestinian refugees in the Valley, there was also a movement from the Valley more inland, where Palestinians tried to find shelter. The government tried with an integrated plan to attract Palestinians back to the Valley.

<sup>107</sup> The Jordan Valley Commission became the Jordan Valley Authority in 1977.

be a possible future money source for Jordan. On the other hand, Jordan is opting for an alternative water project that corresponds more closely to the latest neo-liberal path that it has been choosing. The project named the Jordan Red Sea Project is a Jordan-only initiated water conveyor. It is, first of all, a very vague project; little information has been made public, but the main objective is bringing water to Amman by desalination and hence saving the Dead Sea with the brine. However, the most interesting and perhaps most expected aspect is that it will be mostly privately financed and managed by a 'master developer'. The similarities with the Red-Dead Conveyor are rather obvious, except for the unmentioned studies concerning the Red Sea project and the extra economic developments that will arise in Wadi Araba from the pumped and desalinated water. The option of the latter developments requires developers to apply for the position of master developer. Although both projects are still very unclear about how they will proceed and what the effects will be, the Jordanian government seems very eager to start as soon as possible with the first phase of the Red Sea Project in particular.

The option for the Red Sea Project is not very surprising. Lately, the Jordanian government and entourage have been subjected to criticism and experienced friction within the Jordanian society. A Jordan-only project gives the government, or particularly the King, the opportunity to stand up as the tamer of a natural phenomenon such as water scarcity to bring solace to the people. The media has been successful in the spreading the message that although the water scarcity is severe, help from the government is on the way. The Disi project is thereby presented as the forerunner of a much bigger design. Regardless of its ambitions, the Jordan Red Sea Project plan was recently downscaled due to financial issues. The international crisis has made donors in the shape of foreign countries or private companies reluctant to invest billions of dollars.

Considering the situation of the presence of water in nature versus technocratic terms places Jordan in a loop that will require continuous technological intervention. It has become a self-fulfilling prophecy. In Jordan's current political situation, this pure technocratic perspective<sup>108</sup> on water could become another source of increased internal tensions.

In the last part of this chapter, I shall illustrate further that the discourse on scarcity and related technological interventions are not a coincidental assemblage but belong to the idea that a 'universal modern society' is possible with the right techno-scientific tools.

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<sup>108</sup> We could also say from a neo-liberal perspective that these projects will open the door for the privatisation of water and hence water prices will rise. In the presentation of the conveyor, this is translated as 'water at affordable prices'.

## 6.5 The fluid global connection

When discussing 'a universal process', it is important to keep in mind what Timothy Mitchell argues in his work, 'Rule of Experts', and was I referred to in the introduction. The notions of universalism and modernity carry historical and geographical baggage that should be taken into account in an analysis and not employed as concepts of analysis. The Red Sea Dead Sea Conveyance is an example of a kind of mega project that materialises 'universal' assumptions about what is necessary to bring development to an undeveloped area.

The Red Sea Dead Sea Conveyor and the Jordan Red Sea Project both remain in the planning phase and are thus also hypothetical. I referred to the effects that the Red-Dead conveyor has had in some parts of Jordan and on the future economic developments envisioned in the Jordan Red Sea project. The latter economic developments for Wadi Araba are similar to the (Israeli initiated) promotional movie that shows a blooming Wadi Araba. Although they are part of a very 'fluctuating' future plan, they are important because they are supportive of the discourse about turning scarcity into abundance. The idea of the blooming Wadi Araba through one of the projects has been left aside, but it can be brought back to the forefront at any point when (financial or political) conditions improve.

The creation of the state of Jordan is a never-ending story. With the implementation, or at least the planning process of the water conveyor, Jordan places itself amongst the countries that deal with the vagaries of nature in a very dramatic way, especially in size and economic terms. One of the interviewees, a member of the boards for both the Red Sea Dead Sea water conveyor and the Red Sea Project, saw the mega-projects being implemented abroad as examples for Jordan. The detrimental social and environmental consequences due to these projects are not part of his picture. What did form his and the general picture of both projects was the connections to international funding (multilateral or private) and the international scientific experts (French and British study offices) and their know-how (Kaika, 2006:288). Jordan does not have the financial capacity to implement these kinds of mega projects; therefore, only through connecting with (dominant) Western actors does Jordan see itself capable of leaving the wilderness of the so-called Third World.

The heroes of modernity promised to dominate nature and deliver human emancipation employing imagination, creativity, ingenuity, romantic heroic attitude, and a touch of hubris against the given order of the world. (Kaika,2006:276)

## 6.6 Conclusion

There are doom-laden prophecies on the pending ‘water wars’. The problem with such naturalistic neo-Malthusianism is that it is simply incorrect about the causes of water crises. Naturalistic discourse presents us with a world comprising just humans and nature, where nature is static and unyielding, where the human relationship with nature is limited to its consumption, and where there are consequently insurmountable limits to these consumptive—and indeed exploitative—relations (Selby, 2005:332).

Actually, Jan Selby perfectly represents what this chapter is about. In other words, at this moment, Jordan is failing to provide an amount of water to every citizen that places him or her above the water poverty line. The population growth by birth or migration is indeed an issue that Jordan has had to deal with during the last several decades, up until today. Another fact is that Jordan could earn a greater deal of its income from tourism. The Dead Sea is one of the attractive treasures that it offers to tourists. All of this (i.e. refugee influx and tourism) is very sensitive to regional stability. The construction of a water conveyor could relieve a lot of the pressure on Jordan, at least from a liberal-technical perspective (Jan Selby, 2005:333).<sup>109</sup>

The Red-Dead water conveyor and the Jordan Red Sea project are not very different from any other water related mega project in the world, except that they have not been implemented yet. Both projects plan a rather limited vision of water demand and supply. The water use of people, mainly focused on the poorer segments of society, is defined in terms of inefficiency, a lack of awareness or water theft, in the case of farmers. The uneven allocation to Jordan and its inhabitants must be understood in a broader political and social framework. A pure technocratic injection of infrastructure will not dissolve the existing social and political problems. In fact, with the increased tension inside Jordan, including the relations with the King and the monarchy, it might only compound this friction.

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<sup>109</sup> This refers as well to what Timothy Mitchell points out earlier that from the moment when the problems (in his cases, in Egypt) were defined as natural, social inequality and powerlessness were out of the picture. The main aim thus becomes ‘to overcome “natural” limits of geography and demography’ (Mitchell T., 2002:221-222).



## General conclusion

The dissertation started from a broad research theme that addressed the question of how 'culture' is used in the formation of the state of Jordan and in the interrelated processes and politics of development. In this dissertation the focus was specifically on Wadi Araba, a so-called out-of-the-way place.

The analysis of the creation of Wadi Araba as a governable space within the broader formation of Jordan was based on three major points. First, the naturalisation of the notion of culture has created a dichotomy. Especially the notion of difference between cultures has found its way to other areas outside anthropological studies and reified in reality. It has contributed to a (imagined) division between a normalised perception of life and an 'a-normal' or a-civic/non-civilised way of living. The life of people in Wadi Araba is often indicated as a-normal or a-civic. Second, development is an act of governmentality. Through development discourses and practices directions are given on how to organise one's life. Although development is situated in an a-political sphere, it is (often) political driven and has political effects on the real ground. In the process to build Jordan as a political formation, the realm of development has played and is still playing a crucial part. It helps to govern the population into a certain direction that will contribute to the state formation. Third, places in the margins of the state, as Wadi Araba, are of crucial importance for an understanding of the process of state formation and the politics of development.

The actual research project began with a closer look at the by Jordan, Palestine and Israel proposed and finally approved water conveyor between the Red Sea and Dead Sea. The conveyor will run through Wadi Araba and was initially presented as a pure technical intervention to save the Dead Sea and to provide in fresh water for the regional partners. However, the inhabitants of Wadi Araba were barely involved in the planning process of the water conveyor project. In the dissertation this is argued as a common way to deny or ignore the socio-political meaning of projects as the water conveyor. Although the project can be described as just a technical intervention in an empty space, it has provoked reaction in Wadi Araba (and outside, as in Kerak) from the population.

For the research project it was essential to avoid analysing the conveyor as an isolated case in the area of Wadi Araba. The water project that was represented as an economic and developmental push from the Jordanian government will be implemented in an area that is not an empty page. On the contrary, the area and its inhabitants have a history of so-called economic and developmental pushes by state and non-state actors. By bringing Wadi Araba and the water conveyor together in the picture, I was drawn towards other economic and



infrastructural development programs designed for the area. Besides the fact that the case studies share a common geographical destination, they also contain mutual 'worldviews' (i.e. ideas about how Wadi Araba and Jordan should look like within a globalised world).

In addition to the emphasis on the 'politics' of development, the dissertation also highlights the 'cultures' of development that enable and are the *raison d'être* of 'development' interventions. In this general conclusion I will recapitulate the argument that Wadi Araba is not merely an area in the margins in need for 'improvement'. It is due to a culturalised perspective (or what I have called a 'design for life') of Jordan in general and Wadi Araba in particular, that it has been made possible to push specific development initiatives forward.

The four main chapters present interrelated cases that illustrate past and current initiatives that have created opportunities for development planners and government to manage and control the targeted population (i.e. inhabitants of Wadi Araba). With the construction of a new road connecting the southern village with the capital, the organisation of agriculture, the distribution of houses to the nomadic population, instalment of protected areas etc., the area and its habitants are connected to a powerful system that steers their lives in a particular direction, mainly away from the one they currently maintained. As mentioned above, Wadi Araba is not an isolated area. The initiatives that are designated to the area are neither isolated cases, they all serve the formation of Wadi Araba as a 'governable' space with 'governable' subjects.

The elaboration of the process concerning the intertwinement between state formation and governable spaces for Jordan started in the first chapter. In the formation of Jordan there was a need to 'create' a political community that would identify Jordan as its nation and would help to represent Jordan towards the outside world. This process has been challenged several times and had to adapt accordingly. A returning strategy was to differentiate between those who are part of the political community and those who are not. Who was 'in' or 'out' has changed over time. This inclusion or exclusion was translated in a cultural differentiation. In a country like Jordan – that is increasingly moving towards strong neoliberalism - this has led to a rather Huntingtonian perception of culture as the key for political and economic development. The use of 'the Bedouin culture' as a national symbol has been replaced by the assumption that this culture is a barrier to economic development in the *badia*. In an ambiguous manner this culture is now incorporated into the neoliberal market 'as a set of material objects and distinctive behaviours' that can be commodified (Radcliffe, 2006: 234), and hence can contribute to the further economic development of Jordan and its position in the global market.

The cultural differentiation has been related in the second chapter to the representations of people/'community' and their landscapes. I argue further that the representations, which are translated into development schemes, are often based on a fantasised nexus of community and landscape. The image of Wadi Araba as a rather empty place out of time (i.e. the denial of coevalness) is projected simultaneously onto the inhabitants of Wadi Araba. Through the representation of the spatial context, people are moreover represented as a single, undifferentiated unit, considered (as if) a community living in a different non-modern time. The representation of Wadi Araba and inhabitants is also composed as a snapshot. In the chapter the comparison with the static representations of colonial ethnographies is made.

To strengthen the a-political image of development, Wadi Araba needs to be stripped of all its political and social dimensions. To illustrate this, I introduce in this second chapter the notion of fantasised landscape and community. Inspired by Anderson I tried to go further than the notion of 'imagined'. With the concept of 'fantasised' I want to point at the difference with 'imagined' by arguing that within the development projects that I encountered, it is not about 'how Bedouins are' but about 'how Bedouins could and should be'. The point was not that development initiatives are outside reality, neither that initiatives are a priori a negative impulse. Within my observations I could notice the aim for a particular kind of Bedouin that fits in the modern Jordanian state. (Mitchell T., 2002). Development is as such not only about the 'target'. The constructed fantasies of, in this case, Wadi Araba and its inhabitants do tell us a lot about those who construct the fantasies. Wadi Araba and especially the local people are separated from and indeed placed in structural opposition to the development planners. Insights into the relations between landscape, people and power have become ever more important for a better understanding of the impact of development schemes.

The relations between the different actors are constantly challenged during project planning and implementation. The notion 'constructed visibility' derived from Foucault is not merely about the physical space – in this case Wadi Araba – but also about the people related to this space. The fact that Wadi Araba has the features of an undeveloped place par excellence, where the people themselves are perceived as incapable of taking the initiative for improvement, appears to offer 'an aesthetic alibi' for external intervention. In this second chapter I referred to housing projects, or the implementation of agricultural fields. JVA or JRF work from a more or less participatory approach, emphasising the potential for the area and the inhabitants. Nevertheless, they start from the assumption that there is a limit to the capacities of the people. With regard to agriculture, people can be a farmer or maybe a ground supervisor but they cannot occupy the management function. With the projects that JVA or JRF encourage in Wadi Araba they implement instructions from the 'absent state' to push Jordan further into the 'modern world'. The message, mainly from JRF, is quite clear

‘do not wait for the government to help you’. In this way, the non-state development actors help the government to take a step further on the neoliberal path by implementing projects that carry the ‘design for life’. The way to neoliberalism is supposed to be paved by people’s own initiatives to take care of themselves. People, as in Wadi Araba, do take initiatives, but are many times discouraged or opposed. Private initiatives are recommended, but they have to be implemented within certain guidelines.

Despite a technocratic approach, it became clear that the local population could not (longer) be ignored. Over time, development actors ran into problems and find their projects blocked and cancelled, because their approach was grounded in these fantasised ideas about inhabitants and their landscape. Scepticism and resistance from local people towards new initiatives has grown intensively. The recent uprisings in the region have offered more room for resistance. Amongst several actors, predominantly the RSCN is an example of an involved actor in the area that had to find a balance between international instructions concerning conservation, their own vision and local struggles. Although they developed new strategies to be in good relation with the local inhabitants, their approach is still from an economic and technical perspective. Social and political aspects that have caused friction are blinded.

The RSCN in Wadi Araba has been the main focus in the third chapter. Within the strategic changes that RSCN has made in its approach concerning conservation one can read very well that despite the turn towards participatory development the struggles continue with local inhabitants. RSCN wrote a strategy based on partnership with the local people, but there is still a great gap between RSCN and the inhabitants based on the idea that they do not know how to take care of the environment. People are seen as destructive for nature. Damage has been done to the environment, but that is not due to ‘their cultural mentality’ but due to measurements that have been implemented during decennia. Locals are not without responsibility, but an understanding of why struggles keep on to continue requires a broader perspective.

In the evolution of RSCN, one can detect for example the parallel evolution of the global environment governance agents (e.g. the World Bank or IUCN). RSCN has to twist and turn its policies and project implementations to stand up to the expectations from donors and local inhabitants. By adopting the participatory approach to get a stake in the area - where they have to compete with several other development agents - RSCN has put itself in a very complex position. Mainly the double standard that is applied by RSCN - but again not exclusively by RSCN - towards people and their knowledge has led to a significant distrust

between both parties. RSCN has overstretched its capacity as development agent by making empty promises to people who have been promised so much, but have not experienced many concrete actions. Without romanticising ‘the locals’, people have learned over the past decades how development agents work and how to deal with them. Also the opposite happened; RSCN doesn’t know anymore how to deal with people. This is what we called in the end; a people fatigue.

The Red Sea Dead Sea water conveyor as final case brings us back to the beginning of the dissertation. A water conveyor that will save a holy symbol from disappearing, bring fresh water to the region and might contribute to future peace between Israel and Palestine, might sound as a win-win project. The conveyor is described as a pure technical intervention and is supported by strong discourses that emphasise the (economic and symbolic) importance of the Dead Sea and the scarcity of water.

The shrinking of the Dead Sea or the limited fresh water sources are reduced to natural problems that can be overcome by a technical intervention. References to the next wars as “water wars” frame the project as a necessity. The influx of Syrian refugees served well as data to underline the necessity of implementation. The framework used to present the conveyor is often close to a neo-Malthusian approach of water scarcity. The emphasis on the need for such a project is so strong, that even a second project was formed into plans, a private funded conveyor. Despite critical voices from environmental experts, the project steered by the World Bank got approved.

Within this chapter my attempt was to bring the conveyor together with Wadi Araba. In the conducted studies for the water conveyor, Wadi Araba was a rather coincidental area where the infrastructure has to pass by or build. In this dissertation, the aim was to analyse it as a social and political reality. As already mentioned, by erasing this political and social component, the area is indeed suitable as a construction site. However, inhabitants have heard the project presentations and have formulated their questions but also have created expectations. Water is indeed crucial for a more comfortable life. Besides water, access to land is a very contested issue. Due to the water conveyor, since 2005 land has been frozen to sell or buy. Besides the inability to purchase land, the tribal lands are neither recognised in Wadi Araba. According to some officials, there is no such thing as tribal land in Wadi Araba. Recognition of tribal land would imply that the government or private developer would have to buy the land that is needed to build the conveyor from the tribe.

The water conveyor as a megalomaniac billion-dollar project is not much different from already implemented water related projects in the world. They are constructed on a limited vision of water demand and supply. The water use is described in terms of inefficiency, lack of awareness or water theft. The latter mostly refers to farmers. The (future) allocation of

water will be balanced according to economic contribution. Agriculture receives the major part of water, but contributes little to Jordan's economy, tourism should in this perspective receive more, as it contributes more in economic terms. The current water allocation in the region is, to say it simply, based on political decisions between them. The amount of water Jordan receives today is strongly influenced by the peace agreement with Israel. A future project as the water conveyor between the Red Sea and Dead Sea will not be different. Allocation will depend on economic potential and politics. A small (but significant) note in the media correspondence on the conveyor mentions that Palestine will have to buy water from Israel. Its political meaning and implications will be hard to ignore even with a thick layer of technocracy.

### *Discussion*

Renato Rosaldo (1988) gave an interesting insight on the notion of culture and its implications while he wrote about his time as a young American researcher. As a graduate student, Rosaldo was advised not to do fieldwork in the Philippines, because – as he was told – the people there had no culture (Rosaldo, 1988: 77). What his supervisor intended by this idea that the people in the Philippines have no culture is that 'they' were not so different from 'us'. There was a lack of cultural difference, crucially between the other and the Western, such that the other was not sufficiently other to qualify as such. The notion of culture or rather the idea of culture can also create a distinction between people within modernity and the ones with culture (i.e. non-modern). As Bruno Latour (2002) points out, the West, in relation to science or technology apply the perspective of a dichotomy of modern/culture, whereby the West is not perceived as a culture due to the ability to have access to a particular kind of knowledge (i.e. scientific knowledge).

The two mentioned authors point at a crucial theme that I attempted to connect to the process of the formation of Jordan and its relation to the domain of development. Both Rosaldo's and Latour's attention for the distinction culture-modern and us-them has become very real during the research. The discursive distinction between us and them and mainly the use of the notion of culture as opposite towards modernity, have had real implications in Jordan or Wadi Araba.

Especially the choice of Wadi Araba as a focus for the cases of this dissertation has given the opportunity to point at the continuity of the strategy of culturalisation (of difference) in the development of a political formation as Jordan. The Bedouin population of Jordan has been targeted for transformation schemes since the beginning of the creation of the modern state of Jordan. At different points in time, a Bedouin could embody the Jordanian national symbol

or the last of the Mohicans living outside modernity. Not only the more nomadic lifestyle is indicated as an obstacle to full integration in the modern society but also the very claim of Jordan to modernity is 'polluted' with such a deviation in its midst. The cultural problem can be alleviated through (economic and infrastructural) development.

For this dissertation I conceived the notions of culture, development and governmentality as a triangle. Each notion is in need of the others and they support each other. From the early beginning of Jordan the governing of the area has never been the monopoly of its formal rulers. Previous colonial powers stayed present in Jordan, international cooperation entered the area, internal power struggles inside Jordan intensified etc. each had its effect on the steering of the way Jordan would grow in the future.

The idea of a modern state – which is constantly under challenges from outside and inside – could evolve under the umbrella of development. With the idea of modernity, the idea of a modern population or citizens is accompanied. This is the point where I take Rosaldo's and Latour's remarks on culture into the case of Wadi Araba. Through development interventions in the area, driven by the idea of modernity versus culture, a process of moulding citizens in modern citizens can be enhanced. As such I addressed development as an act of governmentality supported by different strategies as bio-politics (for example the 'construction' of the Bedouin soldiers).

I am very aware that the connection between governmentality and development has been the subject of research for the last decades. At the same time, the analyses on theory and practices of development and its effects have been supported by concepts as culture, mainly in the discipline of anthropology. Nevertheless, with this dissertation I intended to bring the (old) notion of culture back into the analysis of development and its historical background in relation to Jordan for two reasons. First, it is a scarcely used concept in the political sciences. As mentioned above, the connection between culture and development, development and governmentality or governmentality and culture has a history in social sciences such as anthropology. I intended to push these connections further into the political sciences; therefore I would refer to the dissertation as a political cultural critique. Second and related to the previous point, the notion of culture is perceived as an obsolete concept of analysis. The general tenor in the dissertation has been that culture matters to understand the social and political implications of development discourse and practice in a reality. The use of the idea of culture as a tool of power has been very effective in the history of Jordan.

Despite the long history of critical development research, I would argue for a lasting attention since the same (colonial) development patterns are currently still present. Through

elaborating on the cases that illustrate 'state' and non-state initiatives that are situated in Wadi Araba I wanted to demonstrate continuation and parallels between the different illustrated initiatives.

When the mandate period ended, the opportunity came for the Hashemite king and its entourage to develop the previous colony as an independent kingdom. Obviously the kingdom did not develop in a vacuum. Internationally, regionally and locally the king was pushed in different directions. When the peace treaty in 1994 was signed, also Wadi Araba was released from its military designation. A new area opened up for interventions. The vision for a Valley of Opportunities was dugged up again. Already before 1994 housing projects were installed in Wadi Araba, but from the late 90s early 2000s more actors got involved there. For me both the 'start' of Jordan and the change of Wadi Araba from a blind spot to a hot spot show similar patterns; they are driven by the assumption that this was a beginning from scratch. I read the initiatives for the bigger project of the formation of Jordan or the small-scale projects for Wadi Araba as if they were to be implemented in an empty page without any existing political and social reality and broader context.

An organisation as the RSCN shows some equal similarities in their positioning as a conservation organisation that is internationally steered and in the way they approach Wadi Araba. They started from fenced conservation to move towards a participatory approach. In the fifth chapter I illustrate that this was much orchestrated internationally. New trends in development were projected on the RSCN to follow. Although they did follow the new approach, the bottom idea is still that people (i.e. Bedouins) are a threat to nature. It has resulted in a situation whereby every intervention in the area makes new forms of conflict arise around control of land, resources etc. The fact that they did take participation and 'communities' in consideration could be a way to enter and encourage the conservation projects in relation to a social and political 'empowerment' of the involved local population. Counter-reactions are a constant, because of the denial of the political and social meaning the implementation of conservation areas have.

The resistance or counter-projects that are observed in Wadi Araba could open doors for a different, broader and more political understanding of participation. Reaction towards initiatives is not per definition a withdrawal. More constructively it could be regarded as an engagement to changes in the area. People are not resistant to change but are confronted with social and political conflicts within their daily lives. Any of the involved development actors in Wadi Araba (non-governmental and governmental) has been reluctant to incorporate these conflicts in their project planning.

Unfortunately when plans do not work out, the 'failure' is pointed towards the 'target' population. Therefore I also saw the value of governmentality within the triangle with culture

and development. Power is never a monopoly of the ruler. Although the central state has given/self-proclaimed authority and development organisation come with a certain expertise or knowledge, it does not equal a power that subjugates a population as a whole. The 'witches' brew' cannot be ignored.

The situation of the RSCN resembles to a certain extend with the situation of the JRF, although the latter receives much less direct counter-reaction. The project concerning the water conveyor might seem to be a different story. However, it contains some of the basic arguments of the dissertation. Latour points out very clearly in his 'War of Worlds' how 'the West' has been able to put itself outside culture. The idea is that through the scientific knowledge that the West has appropriated, it has been able to overcome nature and places itself outside culture, but within modernity. The authority that has been given to scientific knowledge has put other forms of knowledge on the side. Many times the card of science has served to dismiss counter-arguments from local inhabitants. A water conveyor that covers a distance of 180 km and that will desalinate billions of liters of water annually is a pure performance of scientific technology. Humans and nature are thereby placed against each other. Jordan can show itself to be part of the modern societies by pushing forward the water conveyor to solve the needed water for consumption and to save the Dead Sea. The project in itself is supported by a rational that is based on a technocratic approach that disconnects the conveyor from the context it will eventually be constructed. The physical context is Wadi Araba, besides environmental research the people themselves have hardly been informed. Wadi Araba is again the white spot on the planner's map, what reduces the challenges of being slowed down by social or political obstacles.

The dissertation questioned the role of the idea of culture in the process of Jordan's state formation and interrelated politics of development. I focused on Wadi Araba to illustrate how this processes of state formation and development are reflected in Wadi Araba. As a 'recent' hotspot for development initiatives, the interaction in Wadi Araba between development actors, the idea of culture and Foucault's notion of governmentality has been illuminating to show the continuous culturalisation of governance in Wadi Araba. Economic and infrastructural development has to give a push to Wadi Araba and its inhabitants to move with the whole Hashemite Kingdom towards modernity. Housing, agriculture, tourism or nature conservation are implemented emptied of social and political meaning. I have referred to this as 'designs for life' for the 'target groups'. If the people would follow this design, it would help Jordan to complete as a modern state (i.e. a neoliberal state) with some space for 'the Bedouin culture' as a living heritage in the tourism sector. Despite the planned designs, the interactions have caused an interesting dynamic of counter-projects and reactions



initiated by the people of Wadi Araba. Glubb experienced this during the mandate period, the JVA or RSCN encounter this today in the 'pristine' landscape of Wadi Araba.

### *Limitations and future research*

The limitations of the research for the finalisation of the dissertation can at the same time be perceived as challenges and new approaches for future research. The struggles during the research are elaborated in the methodological chapter. In this final point I will go further with the limitations.

Although my academic background is situated in the cultural sciences, the aim of the dissertation was to introduce the notion of culture more into the political sciences and bring it back to the realm of development studies. In anthropology there is already a great amount of attention for the interrelation of different scales (local to global) and 'the politics'. As such I sought to bring 'the politics' to different kinds of scales through using the notion of culture within a political analysis. In this attempt it was important to relate Wadi Araba with Jordan and the even broader regional/international scale. The use of anthropological literature and a lack of (classical or contemporary) political theory to form a political cultural critique, could be interpreted as a rather 'in between' approach. The interdisciplinary way of working is often encouraged, but not being able to situate one's work in a specific discipline can have (negative) consequences for a researcher's future. Nevertheless, I would argue that a closer approach between political sciences and anthropology or cultural sciences could be a workable and more in depth way of doing research, both in terms of methodology and theory.

A second issue that limited the research and the final dissertation has been the lack of knowledge of the Arabic language. The rather limited literature about Wadi Araba made the need for interviews in the area stronger. As I could not inform myself on existing literature to orient my interests or questions and as I was dependent on an interpreter, it was complicated to gather a great amount of empirical data in short periods of time. The crucial presence of an interpreter created a distance between the interviewees. This all slowed down the information gathering. Due to the ability of most NGO or governmental employees to conduct interviews in English, the equilibrium between empirical data from local Wadi Araba inhabitants and Amman/Aqaba based officials was likely to go out of balance. The data that was collected from Wadi Araba has been, in the end, more limited in quantity. I am aware that I put emphasis on a rather anthropological approach of research but at the same time I myself have not been able to succeed fully in this attempt. With the information that I was able to analyse and bring together with a theoretical political-cultural perspective, I aspire

that this dissertation can help as a base to build on future research in Wadi Araba or to start a critique from.

Future research in the area of Wadi Araba should take the history of the area with questionnaires and surveys strongly in consideration. People have been questioned about many topics and asked about opinions, but have hardly seen their answers come into existence. This has created a certain reluctance to participate into interviews and to share sometime sensitive information. Nevertheless this can create a challenge or opportunity for an approach of research that is more engaged with the encountered realities. As I mentioned in my methodological chapter, a more engaged (which is not per se equal to 'take side') manner of research could be a step to a decolonisation of (social) sciences. Within the engagement, one can take the knowledge that is not one's own as part of the analysis (cf. Mignolo and Grosfoguel) or one can go as far as being an activist or militant scholar (cf. Scheper-Hughes).

During the research of the doctorate I experienced the difficulty of not being biased towards development initiatives or actors. For me being engaged meant in the beginning to take the side of the inhabitants of Wadi Araba. Obviously this attitude does not contribute to a better understanding of the situation in Wadi Araba. Therefore, the critique that I formulate in this dissertation is not to accuse the development initiatives of being inherently 'harmful' or 'bad'. With the critique I wanted to point at struggles that are often ignored and keep on causing friction. I experienced that addressing these critiques to involved actors can be appreciated and perceived as useful. At other moments the critique can also be dismissed or felt as offensive. Either way, a critique can be useful for all involved actors, even for the researcher who will receive reaction to his or her analysis

After finalising the research and assembling the dissertation, new events occurred in Wadi Araba. New protests arose against proposed conservation areas and the Red Sea Dead Sea water conveyor received the signatures that will give room for next steps towards implementation. The resistant that becomes stronger and more forceful towards RSCN, but also experienced by JVA could bring more interesting dynamics in the area and beyond. Although the area has been given the label of being empty, I have experienced it as a very dynamic area in the last four years of research. The landscape and its inhabitants contain a lot of knowledge that can teach us about the development of Jordan as a modern state.



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